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SPECIAL INTERZONE ISSUE¹

FEATURING:

Darkness Upon the

Face of the Deep

By Harlan Ellison



The Cry of a Seagull

By Lois Tilton

Art by Carol Heyer

The air held the damp, gray-green scents of pine and fog. The distant lights of Vancouver were alive on the black surface of the harbor, shivering at the touch of the waves. Chen Wuchiang leaned against the ship's rail, welcoming the touch of the cool mist on his face. He took a long, slow draw on his cigarette. The ship was asleep. The city across the harbor slept, oblivious, uncaring.

We'll be safe once we get to Canada. It's a Commonwealth nation. They won't turn us away.

His father's words. Nineteen years ago Chen Wei had smuggled his family out of Hong Kong, packing them into the rusting freighter's hold. Chen had been six years old. Sharp, fragmentary memories: the tobacco-smell of his father holding him crushed tightly against his chest. It was hard to breathe. Then Grandmother had taken him into her own arms. She rocked him, whispering softly. It would be all right. The ship was like a crane bearing them all across the sea to the Isles of the Immortals. Her face had been serene with hope, and finally, lulled by the movement of the ship, he had fallen asleep.

Chen still had the passport in a lacquer box behind his sleeping mat. "This is yours." Father had shown him that night, holding out the booklet so his son could see his own name printed there in English characters. "Proof that you're a Commonwealth citizen, not just some filthy refugee."

That was his father's legacy: the passport and a gold Rolex, useless now without a battery.

Vancouver slept on across the harbor, a birthright denied him. Of course, their case was still somewhere in the Canadian court system. One day the matter would be resolved. The alternative was never mentioned: the refugee camps, a final solution of sorts to the international problem of the unwanted. Neglect, disease, starvation — everywhere the conditions sent the same message: There's no place for you here. Stay away.

The city's reflected lights broke up in the wake of a patrol boat, and Chen heard the metallic echo of the waves gently slapping the hull. The *Golden Crane* had legitimate business in port, had a cargo to offload. They weren't just another refugee ship — as long as no one tried to go ashore.

"Elder brother Chen?"

He half-turned from the rail, irritated at the interruption. Only Liang Ling could come up behind him so quietly.

"Your grandmother was asking for you."

He sighed, stubbed out his cigarette. "Tell her I'll be right there." Liang Ling was by no means the prettiest girl on the ship, but she was modest and quiet, exactly the traits Lao Song valued in a potential granddaughter-in-law. And Chen was her only grandson, already twenty-five years old.

Just as he started to leave the rail there was a movement behind the shadow of the crates piled up on the

foredeck. "Who's there?" he whispered.

The movement paused, and then Wong Dabao stood up into view. He was wearing shorts, with a plastic bag strapped to his back. Chen knew what he was planning to do, and his arm shot out to pull the other man back from the rail. "Wong, no! Don't try it!"

Wong's muscles tensed and he jerked away. "You can't stop me!" he whispered.

The tone of his voice made Chen drop his arm. "But what about your family, your wife?" he blurted.

"She ... It's no good! I can't go on like this!"

There was silence as they both stared across the black stretch of the harbor and watched the running lights of another patrol boat out of sight. The calm surface of the water could be deceptive. Nets, razor-edged wires — although Chen tried to convince himself that Canada would never take such measures. This was the humane West, after all.

Ling's voice again. "Elder brother Chen, are you coming?"

Chen spun around, and in that instant of distraction came the sound of a splash from the darkness behind him. But even as he wished Wong all the luck that he could summon, a pang of envy stabbed him.

Freedom.

There were seagulls crying somewhere above the ship when Chen came up onto the deck, blinking in the hot white sun glare of the South China Sea. He had just spent eight hours in the sweatbox of the engine room, welding another patch onto the starboard boiler. But up here on the searing plates of the upper deck it was like the dry heat of an oven.

He was drained, weak-legged with exhaustion, his grimy undershirt drenched with sweat, but with the repairs made the ship was finally underway again, and the rush of breeze against his skin felt good. As always when he came off-shift, Chen liked to go up on deck, out where the sky and the ocean were the only visible boundaries.

He was far from being alone. Where cargo wasn't stacked there were people, and Chen had to pick his way through the canopies they had rigged to give them a little shade. No matter how crowded, it was better up here than the stifling heat belowdecks. Ventilation was always bad on the *Golden Crane*. The ship had never been designed to accommodate so many people.

But Chen had another reason these days to avoid the cramped quarters he shared with his grandmother. Liang Ling seemed to be there all the time now, busy with one errand or another. "She helps an old woman," Lao Song insisted. "The Liangs can spare a daughter."





Indeed, the Liangs had four daughters — four too many, as Old Liang always said. Chen had no illusions where all this was supposed to be leading, but so far he had ignored his grandmother's hints. It wasn't that there was anything actually wrong with Liang Ling, but he just couldn't make himself face the responsibility of a wife, of children. Not while they were still stuck here on this ship.

Wong Dabao had gotten away. Common sense objected that Wong was more likely drowned or behind the wire of some camp, but Chen could count twenty-two people who'd gone over the side while they were docked at Vancouver or San Francisco. Some of them must have made it. Of course, right now he had Grandmother to take care of, but someday ...

He found a place near the bow where the spray was cool and sank down onto a heap of unused rope and canvas. He reached into the pocket of his shorts for his cigarettes. Just three left in the battered pack. He tapped one out, lit it, and his oily fingers smudged the thin white paper.

Nicotine rushed through his bloodstream, made him light-headed. Someday, he thought. Lao Song was very old, after all. Inhaling, he couldn't help remembering his father — Chen Wei, a carton-a-day smoker back in Hong Kong, had died of emphysema six years ago.

"Those things will kill you, too," Grandmother constantly shrieked at him, afraid he would die and leave her alone, an old woman with no one to bury her.

"Look! Out there!"

Chen looked up, saw people everywhere on deck running to the side. He stood and went to the rail, shading his eyes until he saw what they were pointing at, the dismantled wreck almost dead ahead.

"A boat," people were saying. "Refugees."

It was — had been — a junk, a fishing boat. Someone had tried to rig a sail to the broken spars, but they were making no headway, wallowing on the ocean's surface. The weight of the people crowding to the side to wave at the freighter was threatening to overturn the hull.

Had it been a storm? Pirates? Chen heard people exclaiming, "So many people! It's a wonder it doesn't sink!"

"They're waving at us," a young woman's voice said uncertainly. "Maybe some of them are hurt."

Instantly the crowd turned on her. "People like that deserve what happens to them! They should have known better — such a boat on the open sea! Not even a motor!"

Or the motor had broken down, Chen thought uneasily to himself.

Just then someone yelled, "Look!"

There was a splash at the junk's side, and a moment later a man's head came to the surface, swimming toward the *Golden Crane*. Chen watched another figure dive over the side, then two more.

People around him reacted frantically. "No!" they screamed at the swimmers, who were barely visible in the swell of the waves. "Go back! There's no room! No room!"

Then the freighter lurched, picking up speed as it altered course away from the drifting wreck. Chen's glance darted up to the thickening black billows of smoke coming from the stacks, and he swore silently to himself, thinking of the strain on the engines.

The crowd started to drift away, but Chen stayed at the rail, watching while the swimmers, one by one, disappeared from sight until finally not even the junk could be

seen. Only the gulls, circling overhead.

He stared down at the crushed cigarette he was still holding, then flung it over the side, where the bow wave took it and the scrap of tobacco disappeared into the foam.

The *Golden Crane* limped out of Singapore, its engines clanking and leaking as badly as they had coming in. There had been no money to spare for repairs. Again.

Chen ground his teeth together as he worked, irritable from nicotine deprivation. The committee had overridden the needs of the ship's smokers this time in port. "A poisonous luxury," they insisted. "The ship needs vital supplies, fuel."

Grudgingly, Chen admitted to himself that the state of the engines was more important than cigarettes. Wrenching at a corroded valve, he complained to the chief engineer, "How do they expect us to keep this rustbucket running? We don't even have spare parts!" In desperation, they had cannibalized the auxiliary engines for parts years ago.

"Price of oil," Yang Yufeng said tersely. The older man knew the ship had been ready for the scrapyard twenty years ago, when they'd first taken it out of Hong Kong. The rich, the corrupt officials, had been able to get out before the takeover. The ordinary people — a mechanic like Yang, a minor clerk like Chen Wei — had been forced to take more desperate measures. The ancient freighter had only been intended to survive a single crossing of the Pacific. But a generation later, it was still afloat, still steaming from port to port, paying its way by hauling cargo at the cheapest rates available.

"Twenty years heading nowhere," Chen muttered rebelliously. Canada hadn't wanted them, Australian ports were closed to Asian immigrants, Taiwan's gunboats had orders to fire on any refugee boats that entered its waters. But even after so long, the old mouths on the committee still only cared whether the ship would make it to the next port, and then the one after that. After all, someday ...

Chen swore out loud and sucked at the blood oozing from the knuckles on his right hand. Yang glared at him for his carelessness, and Chen ground his teeth, putting his mind back on his work.

He was not in any good mood, when he finally came off shift, to see Liang Ling waiting for him out on the upper deck. He started to brush past her, but she nervously darted out a hand to stop him. Her eyes were lowered to the deck as she whispered, "My family is cooking dinner in our quarters tonight. We have a fish. If you haven't eaten, we'd be pleased to have you as our guest."

Chen hesitated. "Have you eaten?" was a purely conventional greeting. It was a grave and serious matter to have a guest for dinner with the meager provisions available aboard the ship, but Ling's invitation seemed genuine. There could be only one explanation. But in that case, why hadn't her father been the one to ask him, or at least her brother?

He scowled. They were all arranging this behind his back — his grandmother, the old women, everyone on the ship was a matchmaker. Liang had four daughters to dispose of, this one the least pretty with her narrow,

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Editor

Charles C. Ryan

Publisher

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Assistant Editors

Daniel D. Kennedy

Laurel Lucas

Janice M. Eisen

Floyd Kemske

Mary C. Ryan

Dorothy Taylor

Kristine Danowski

Maria Gavelis

Kevin Fogarty

Advertising

Mary Perry

Tel. 1-617-935-9326

Gofers

Charles E. Ryan

Thomas S. Ryan

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Like a Flithiss from its Shell

By Gary W. Mitchell
and M. Alan Clarkson

Art by Larry Blamire

The wake formally began at sunset, though it had probably started in fact with Lanos, who began drinking before Kliite was actually dead. By firstmoon, three early casualties had been propped in a corner, and even old Timmet had joined the singing.

Ili reclined in a patch of relative quiet and darkness against one wall, watching the crowd and waiting for the next story to begin. She raised Kliite's best metal cup to her mouth and sipped. The nyarra sent warming vapors up her nasal ducts.

The alien sat beside her. Its white airsuit stood out amongst the roomful of flesh-green and dusty wood. Its always unreadable face was nearly invisible behind the reflections of lights on the hardfoambubble that surrounded it.

Ili frowned as she remembered the whistling shriek which had announced its arrival, how she had looked up to see the alien birdmachine flash overhead, too low. It had plunged into Tesengy canyon, out of sight.

There was a terrific explosion.

Ili looked up from her brerrpond. A square of bright orange floated above, in sharp relief against the darkening sky. It drifted lazily down like a windblown leaf, a white airsuitd Ur-rt dangling beneath like some strange seedpod.

Ili had seen the sexless things from the stars before — had traded with them, brerrmilk for metal — but never had she seen one arrive thus.

She dropped her trimmer and stood to watch. The brerr she had been cropping quickly withdrew and slipped beneath the surface of the pond.

The Ur-rt drifted closer and closer. *Germs and defecation!* It was landing in a cultivation pond. Ili ran, skirting ponds and patches of mud, arriving at the far row just as the Ur-rt splashed into the muddy water and disappeared. Its orange leaf-thing settled over the surface, floated there like half-rotted lirk in a brewer's cask.

She expected the alien to be consumed, but to her surprise it came striding out of the pond, apparently undisturbed by the many brerr which clung all about it, trailing off into the water. Their syrl grasped at its airsuit and scrambled for purchase against the smooth hardfoambubble that encased its head.

The alien pulled a white wand from its suit and casually burned through the entwining syrl. Ili whistled in rage as she saw the once-valuable brerr fall into the water, ruined.

The alien looked in the direction its crippled birdmachine had gone, then at Ili as if noticing her for the first time. Its mouth worked and she heard muffled grunting and groaning from within the bubble.

A metal disc on the thing's chest buzzed and began to

speck, "I home go. ???"

Ili was shocked. It wanted to go home? Those brerr represented a season's hard work — they represented metal. "Deru's plague on all yours," she shouted at it. "What about my brerr?"

The alien regarded her, making ambiguous motions with its arms. It began its coarse grunting again and the chestdisc spoke, "???" The Ur-rt pointed toward the canyon. "Trayd Awpoest Slols," it said as if it hadn't heard her. "I go. Wherehow. ???"

Ili shook her head, disbelieving. How could any creature that could fly between stars be so stupid ... and so rude? Maybe it was their powerful technology that allowed them to be so and still survive — who would dare be rude in return? And this one could barely speak!

She thrummed her softtissues in resignation. "You can walk to Trayd Awpoest Slols in two days. A bridge crosses the canyon Tesengy there, near the center of village Lavinohs." She pointed toward a thick cluster of low stone and splitwood buildings.

Again the Ur-rt began to shuffle about inscrutably, waving its arms, obviously agitated. It spoke again, "I to others Slols talk. Big others. Where. ???"

Ili passed a played hand through the air between them, wiping away the thing's entreaties.

"What about my brerr?" she asked again. But the Ur-rt only shook its funny head and flapped its hands at her.

"You me big others take." When Ili didn't move, the Ur-rt walked around her and headed for the village.

Ili hesitated for a moment, dejectedly watching the leaf-thing sink slowly into the pond, where it would surely kill the remaining brerr.

Blowing heavily and thrumming her softtissues, she hurried to catch the white airsuit, determined to collect payment somehow.

As they neared the village, Ili saw the remains of the canyon Tesengy bridge. It had hung there all of Ili's life, like part of the land. Now it was gone; the alien's birdmachine had shattered it in passing.

The Ur-rt would have to find another way to go home. In the meantime, she would take it to Kliite's wake. Ili had despised Kliite; she would not miss his deathparty. And there the Ur-rt would surely find its "others" to talk to.

But now the alien just sat, as it had since they arrived, only watching, never participating. Why had it wanted to come at all?

Nyon, passing by, stopped and sat opposite the alien. "Ur-rt," he said, making a belching sound. "Do Ur-rt have deathparties?"



Iili wrinkled her eyefolds hopefully. Perhaps it would become interested in Nyon and leave her in peace. Probably not.

The metal disc spoke, "Explain. ???"

Nyon gestured with his cup to indicate the room full of Slos. "Deathparties. Wakes. When Ur-rt die, do other Ur-rt come together to remember and tell stories?"

It made a series of its queer sounds. "Gathering, yes," the disc said. "Tribute dead-one's achievements. Yes. Ur-rt have."

Nyon wrinkled his eyefolds at Iili and stood. She agreed, a tribute to achievements was not the way she would put it. That was the problem with the alien's speech.

How well, she wondered, does it understand us? As Nyon moved to the front of the room.

A sturdy table from Kliite's growroom — its contents summarily dumped on the floor — had been dragged to the end of the main room, where it was heaped with food and drink from Kliite's private stores. Nyon clambered carefully onto it and into a clearing which had been left in the middle. The singing faded from the room, replaced with an expectant hush.

"Kliite was a brave man," Nyon began, and was drowned out almost instantly in a wave of hoots and nose whistles. Everyone stamped their feet in approval. "Fierce," he snarled, making animal-like clawing gestures for effect. He raised up on his toes and bounced in little bounces. The noise rose about him as he capered amongst the dishes. "Feared by males and aspired to by females."

"Kliite chose an exotic Kkokkonni from far inland. Alas, she had no interest in him. Her attentions were given to brave Kliite's longtime rival." Nyon paused, scanning the crowd before settling upon the choice person. With an extravagant wave of his arm he drew everyone's attention to that person, and announced the name with a flourish. "Lanos!"

Lanos, caught in mid-drink, gulped his nyarra too quickly, belched, then assumed an air of pompous self-satisfaction.

"But a male as fierce as Kliite would settle for none other than his first choice." Nyon became serious, his voice dropped. "He challenged the nasty Lanos to a foshesh duel, with the female as prize."

Iili recognized one of her favorite tales. Much cheering — and other noises — greeted the well-known foshesh story.

"Lanos, being arrogant, agreed at once. A date was set, and at the appropriate time the two rivals met in a cleared field.

"Kliite bravely jumped into the fight, attacking his enemy furiously." Nyon picked two serving spoons up from the table. He raised his hands over his head and wheeled the spoons around. Bits of food flew off into the crowd. A chorus of hoots approved his performance.

"He beat at Lanos first with the right, then the left, then the right again. Lanos, hopelessly outmatched, was quickly driven backward. Kliite pressed, driving Lanos nearer the edge of the marked area.

"When it seemed that Kliite would surely force the other outside the marked square, one strike tumbled Lanos to the ground. Kliite paused, gallantly allowing Lanos to regain his feet.

"This was the moment Lanos needed. Throwing his

foshesh away, he ducked under Kliite's guard and attacked him barehanded!

"Yes! The cowardly, cheating Lanos used his bare hands, grabbing Kliite's face ... *by the softtissues!*"

A rash of rude noises showed the crowd's contempt for the fiendish action. Many people winced in empathy, unconsciously fingering their own faces. Lanos tried to growl at those near him, but the nyarra had befuddled him and it came out as another belch.

"Kliite howled." Nyon dramatically demonstrated the sound. "He was in great pain, but he was strong. With heroic effort, he beat Lanos about the head and shoulders.

"Lanos could not defend himself from the beating of Kliite's foshesh. He released his hold and slumped to the ground, falling and rolling onto his back, one arm flung at length across the boundary.

"Kliite had won the female."

The room erupted with whistles and yells and the sharp ceramic explosions of Kliite's best mugs as some of the more enthusiastic guests hurled them against the floor.

Lanos drained his own mug and sent it crashing into the wall near Nyon's head. Nyon ducked, turned the motion into an exaggerated bow, and jumped down from the table.

The crowd surged forward in a wave, grabbing up plates piled with food and new mugs of nyarra before the next story began.

Iili considered joining them, but she heard the alien begin to grunt.

"The bridge. She repaired will be. When. ???" it asked.

Iili was startled, then angry. It was the Ur-rt's birdmachine which had destroyed the bridge. The Ur-rt was arrogant indeed to evoke it now.

Her softtissues puffed out. She considered standing and pushing by it as it deserved — refilling her cup and then sitting elsewhere. Let the Ur-rt grunt babytalk at someone else.

But she held back — patience pays three times, she reminded herself. And the Ur-rt still owed her restitution for the brerr it had abused. She held up a hand, thumbs extended. "It will take two days. Possibly three."

It writhed within the suit as if beset by pubic beetles. One gloved finger marked a semicircle in the air. "Walk over."

"Do you mean around?" Iili suppressed a snort. "The way around the canyon is four days — two in the Greysands." She winked her eyefolds. "There is no water there."

It clawed the air with its white gloves. "Through river go."

Iili's softtissues wrinkled into a smile at the image. She shook her head. "You will be eaten alive."

That seemed to shut it up for a while.

The background clatter died down again. Ronosao had mounted the table.

Too late, Iili remembered that she was out of nyarra.

Ronosao stood still, hands clasped before him, and waited for perfect quiet. Unlike Nyon, Ronosao projected a calm and pomposity that were seemingly impervious to nyarra.

"When Kliite was young," he began, "apprenticed to Kree the fermentor from whom he stole the secrets of the nyarra trade, the local beds of lilrk mosses became dis-



eased and most shriveled and died. Without the lirk, nyarra could not be fermented. Kree decided to have a contest among his apprentices."

Iili sighed. Ronosao always told the same story at every deathparty, and always told it badly. She leaned toward the Ur-rt and tapped on its stiff suit.

"What about my brerr?" she asked.

"??? Brerr. ???"

"The brerr you ruined in my pond."

"Brerr red thing is. ???"

"Yellow," she corrected it absently. "Yes. Expensive things are."

The Ur-rt hesitated a moment, then seemed to understand. "Trayd Awpoest Slols pay. Ruined in my pond brerr buy. Report to Trayd Awpoest Slols will I." It bared its teeth at her.

Iili cheered, despite her empty cup. At the front of the room, Ronosao was stooping and peeling invisible wads of lirk moss from the table, placing them in an invisible sack. He straightened and clasped his hands in front of him again. "Kliite had won the contest." He bowed to the indifferent applause, then climbed down.

Lanos and three other staggering males emerged from Kliite's growroom, rolling another drum of nyarra before them. It groaned like thunder across the floor, crushing spilled food and pottery shards. Someone screamed as it rolled over a foot. Lanos and the others stood the drum upright and broke the seal, casting the cover aside. Lanos plunged a hand in, pulling out a clump of rotten black lirk. Iili grimaced. All of the ripe nyarra was apparently gone; this drum was obviously less than a nineday old. She triply regretted her empty cup now — she lacked Lanos's indestructible stomachs.

Her nostrils fluttered around a heartfelt sigh. Barkbrew for the rest of the night, and at only second moonrise. That was probably best. The less she drank now, the better she would do when the time came to divide up Kliite's things.

There was a general press toward the food, and Iili stood to join it. As she squeezed by the alien, it put out its white-clad arm to stop her. The material of its airsuit was slick and cold. It felt fragile and thin, but she remembered the brerr clinging to it as it rose from her cultivation pond. They had not even scratched it. A careless brerr granger falling into that pond would have been dissected and consumed.

She fingered a pair of old scars across the back of her hand. There was a saying that you could tell a granger's age by counting her fingers. Iili had all twelve, but she was still young. She coveted those gloves. She found herself wondering how she could fit her other thumb in.

"I request many containers of water." The alien held its hands apart, one above the other, indicating something about the size of its head, then performed an elaborate pantomime of drinking from a large mug.

Her nostrils pinched closed in sudden anger. Did it expect her to act as its servant?

But the Ur-rt grasped one of the bulges on its suit, and when it held its hand out to her she saw a cube of copper resting there. The light danced along its perfect sides and edges.

Iili quickly scooped the cube from the alien's glove and dropped it into a small pocket. A few more of these and she would recover her losses.

"How many containers of water?" she asked.

It paused before replying, as if thinking it over. It held up one white finger. "I require only one," it said. Then it held its hands one above the other, as before. "But very many."

Iili wrinkled her eyefolds in a shrug. It must mean a big drink, she thought.

At the food table, Iili found a small overlooked bowl of flithii, hidden beneath a broken pot. She found water for the alien and filled her own cup with barkbrew. She returned and watched as the Ur-rt poured water from the mug into a false nostril on its chest. It looked at her and pointed at the now wet nostril. "To make the water pure," the disc said. She saw it dip its head within the bubble and take something like a nipple in its mouth.

Iili was amazed to see who now approached the speaking table. Timmet had attended every deathparty as far back as Iili could remember, and she had never participated in the storytelling. Never!

Two sturdy males took Timmet by the waist and lifted her bodily onto the table. The entire gathering waited in expectant silence; this was such an event that it could well become a tale in itself. Timmet, frail, bent with age, her face weathered, composed herself.

"Years passed," she began in a quiet voice. "Kliite's feats became well known, he added improvements to the stolen brewing techniques, and became well respected and loved by all who knew him."

There were rude but subdued noises, careful not to drown Timmet out.

"As befitted one of his stature, Kliite resolved to carve himself the best fosh to be found. To do this he knew he must use mot wood which grows in the forest which lies across the Tesengy river which flows through the great Greysands desert which lies at the edge of our village."

Timmet suddenly became serious and raised her hands in a warding gesture. "To do this he must live through the brerron which infests the river. No one could possibly swim fast enough to avoid it. Not even the mighty Kliite."

"Using his notorious ingenuity, Kliite devised a plan to cross the river unharmed."

"There is a plant, the brerrbane, which is poisonous to brerron yet harmless to Slols. On the day Kliite swam the river, I went too, and watched as he stripped and wrapped himself in the brerrbane leaves. And to ease his swimming, for the leaves would slow him down greatly, I rubbed him and the leaves with hwahe oil." Timmet's hands caressed the unseen curves of a strong Slols, and her eyes went wide in an expression of lust.

Iili almost gagged on a swallow of barkbrew. For a moment the laughs and whistles swelled, but Timmet stood, patient and quiet, waiting for the noise to die away before continuing.

"Thus prepared, Kliite entered the river. With all his effort, he swam toward the opposite shore. He did not have to look for the brerron, he could sense it closing in on him from all sides. The Tesengy brerron is always present."

"It wrapped syrl about Kliite's ankle. It only gave a slight tug, then turned loose. Again and again the brerron wrapped its syrl about some part of him, only to give a small pull and then release him."

"Finally he reached the safety of the forest shore. Very little of the hwahe oil was left, but the brerrbane leaves were only torn in a few places. A small taste of the

poisonous plant was more than enough for the brerron."

Timmet paused and studied some of the foods arrayed on the table around her feet. She considered one half-empty bowl for a moment, then kicked it onto the floor.

Clutching wrinkled and worn hands to her withered breast, Timmet gazed out at the crowd. "Ah! One can imagine how he must have looked. The brerrbanna leaves had been left in a pile on the river bank, so that now the bright sunlight shone on his naked hide, glistening with the movement of his strong muscles as he carved the wood."

Iili, trying to imagine the palehided, potbellied Kliite naked in the sun, collapsed to the floor in uncontrollable hysteria. It was absurd.

And Kree's widow, herself, telling the tale! Who would have suspected Timmet of being such a joker?

Timmet sighed heavily at the image she had concocted. Shaking her head as if waking from a dream, she finished her story.

"When Kliite returned, he had to cross the river with only the brerrbanna leaves for protection. All the hwa oil had been washed off during his first crossing.

"This time, the brerron decided the slower swimming creature might have something worthwhile under the poisonous covering. When its syrl did not immediately release Kliite, he had to fight himself free. At first he was pulled under, but eventually resurfaced.

"As he emerged on the shore I, waiting there for his return, saw what he had brought back from his adventure. The most excellent foshesh anyone had ever seen and ..." Timmet stooped and swept up two handfuls of sauce-dripping noodles from a foodbowl "... the syrl from the brerron which had dared to drag him underwater!"

She waved the noodles over her head, simulating one great syrl with many little noodles. The effect was uproarious. Iili, who was still collapsed on the floor and only heard about it later, was sorry to have missed it.

When Iili reemerged from under the table, Timmet was being helped back to her seat amid tremendous noise and destruction. The tales would continue throughout the night, but there was little doubt now whose story would win the competition. Iili thought it a fitting irony that Kree's widow would have first choice of Kliite's possessions.

Except, of course, this wonderful metal cup.

The alien was looking at her again. It groaned and murmured within its bubble and the chestdisc spoke. "The

river just beyond the village." It gestured at the wall behind her head. "This is the Tesengy?"

"Yes."

"This Tesengy river is the river Kliite swam to great-motforest?"

"Yes," she said again, impatiently.

"When Kliite swam it there was also no bridge?"

Congratulations to

The Nebula

Award Nominees

And Special Kudos to: Kristine Kathryn Rusch

For her nomination for: "Story Child"

The nominees are:

Best Novel

Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea Ursula K. Le Guin

Mary Reilly by Valerie Martin

Only Begotten Daughter by James Morrow

Fall of Hyperion by Dan Simmons

Redshift Rendezvous by John Stith

White Jenna by Jane Yolen.

Best Novella

"Weatherman" by Lois McMaster Bujold, *Analog*

"Fool to Believe" by Pat Cadigan, *Asimov's*

"The Hemmingway Hoax" by Joe Haldeman, *Asimov's*

"Mr. Boy" by James Patrick Kelly, *Asimov's*

"Bones" Pat Murphy *Asimov's*

Best Novelette

"The Coon Rolled Down and Ruptured His Larinks, a Squeezed Novel by Mr. Skunk" by Dafydd ab Hugh, *Asimov's*

"Tower of Babylon" by Ted Chiang, *Omni* — a 1st sale

"The Shobies Story" Ursula K. Le Guin, *Universe 1*

"1/72nd Scale" by Ian McLeod, *Weird Tales*

"The Manamouki" by Mike Resnick, *Asimov's*

"A Time for Every Purpose" by Kristine K. Rusch, *Amazing*

"Loose Cannon" by Susan Schwartz, *What Might Have Been Vol. 2*

"Over the Long Haul" by Martha Soukup, *Amazing*

Best Short Story

"Bears Discover Fire" by Terry Bison, *Asimov's*

"The Power and the Passion" by Pat Cadigan, *Omni*

"Lieserl" by Karen Joy Fowler, *Asimov's*

"Love and Sex Among the Invertebrates" by Pat Murphy, *Alien Sex*

"Before I Wake" by Kim Stanley Robinson, *Asimov's*

"Story Child" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch, *Aboriginal Science Fiction*

A Long Time Ago

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner, and more.

For a limited time, while copies last, you can purchase a first-edition hardcover copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* for \$10, plus \$1 postage and handling. If you would like your copy autographed by the editor, please indicate how you would like the note to read.

Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo (St. Martin's Press, 1979) features 12 stories by the following authors:

Harlan Ellison

Brian Aldiss

Alan Dean Foster

Connie Willis

John Kessel

Kevin O'Donnell Jr.

D.C. Poyer

M. Lucie Chin

Joe L. Hensley

and Gene Dewese

John A. Taylor

Gregor Hartmann

and Eugene Potter

STARRY MESSENGER



Send \$11 for each copy to:
Aboriginal Science Fiction
Book Dept.
P.O. Box 2449

Iili had never thought about it before. Strictly speaking, that bridge had hung across canyon Tesengy for twenty-seven generations — until the Ur-rt birdmachine ripped it loose. But the Mot Tale predated the bridge by nines of nines of generations.

Iili shrugged. "There was no bridge," she said at last. "And in the Tesengy live brerron." The disc made it a statement, but she supposed it was intended as a question.

"Yes, yes, yes." She was getting annoyed at its constant questions.

"Very many?" it asked.

"Very many?" thought Iili. Enough, certainly. No one had ever tried to count. Probably only the one — at that size it scarcely mattered.

And then Iili understood. The Ur-rt had made the large-for-many error again, mistaking brerron for many brerr, rather than giant brerr. The same mistake it had made with the water. Comprehension came suddenly. *Kokkonni*. It had been speaking the Kokkonni dialect. The alien's birdmachine had come from as far inland as Slols'. Kokkonni. Iili spoke only enough Kokkonni to haggle, but she should have recognized the accent. It seemed obvious now, despite the flaccid consonants the disc gave to all its words. All Ur-rt she had ever traded with had spoken Teseng'i; it had never occurred to her that they might speak another dialect. But now she remembered all of its mistakes: the lack of overtones, the mixing of words. *She* for *it*. *Red* for *yellow* — the Kokkonni had no word for yellow. And just now *large* for *many*. This Ur-rt traded with the Slols/Kokkonni. Its disc spoke Kokkonni. And now the disc was learning Teseng'i — here, tonight, at Kliite's party.

What a useful tool that would be for a merchant such as herself.

She remembered its question and shook her head, slowly, like Ur-rt. "No," she said. "Not many brerron. Big, but not many."

Unlike her small cultivation ponds, the river offered almost unlimited room for growth. While there was room brerr grew — given enough room, they became brerron. Brerron made sure you put the bridges up high.

She lifted a flithiss from the bowl and, as a joke, offered it to the Ur-rt. It shook its head gravely within its bubble. Smiling, Iili crushed the creature's armored head between her teeth and sucked the tender entrails into her mouth. She rinsed away the tiny bits of shell and sand with a sip of barkbrew from her metal cup, and waited for the next tale to begin.

Kliite's party continued throughout the night, tale following tale. Gaorii gave a moving rendition of the torqslol story, with Kliite winning the fabled battle of patience despite a chronic venereal rash. Matiq related a horrifying variation of the breedingnight ballad. And on. And on.

It was sunrise before all of the consumables were consumed, and only those who had no manners or who became violently sick left before that. Iili, who had not intended to fall asleep, awoke with a start when someone brushed against her. She expected her prizes to be gone, taken while she slept by those who had hung onto consciousness throughout the night, but the metal cup was still gripped in her hand and the cube of precious copper was tucked into her pocket.

Kliite's house had been stripped. Only broken furniture remained, and oblivious Slols slumped in the trash. The alien in its white airsuit was gone. Had it gone to wait impatiently by the bridge, or was it headed for the Greysands?

Groggily, Iili made her way into the bright sunlight. She fondled the cube of copper and wondered if she would ever see more.

She walked slowly through the village, drawn to the cliff. At the severed rims of the bridge she sat, looking out over the forest of motwood beyond the river. In the quiet, she heard the shrieks and buzzes of the birds that lived there.

The Ur-rt was nowhere in sight.

Upstream, morning heat shimmered over the Greysands. Would the alien make its way through the desert?

Would it return with her metal?

She was still sitting there when Lanos came staggering up the trail from Tesengy river canyon. The now-grimy airsuit was slung over his shoulders — devoid of alien.

The Ur-rt had obviously expected its airsuit to protect it as well as brerrbane. Indeed, the Tesengy brerron had shown no more taste for the alien airsuit than had the brerr in Iili's pond. It had cracked the helmet open in its mighty syrl and sucked the Ur-rt out, like a flithiss from its shell. Lanos had spotted the empty suit from the canyon edge and made the long trek to retrieve it. Ur-rt things came very dear, this far from Trayd Awpoest Slols.

He had found something else as well — the Ur-rt birdmachine.

The birdmachine had not sunk into the water, but was half-buried in a patch of moss and mud far enough from the river to be beyond the brerron's reach, hidden from above by trees and the overhang of the cliff. It was badly broken, but there were great lengths of copper wire, sheets of *plisstit*, broken shards of *glissteel* — a treasure house whose owner was recently departed.

Iili climbed carefully into the birdmachine's ruined doorway, then turned to face the crowd sitting and standing on stones and patches of dry ground. They waited for sunset.

Lanos had a strong claim on the airsuit, but he would not be allowed to keep all of the Ur-rt tools attached to it. They would be divided up, along with the contents of the birdmachine.

The sun touched the rim of Tesengy canyon and Iili began. "The Ur-rt ..." Iili paused, amended herself, "*our* Ur-rt," she continued fondly, "was known to all as a friend, but also as a great giver of wisdom. No one better understood our Land or its children, the Slols. No one spoke more eloquently. No one was more handsome."

There were hoots at this, and whistles. Feet slapped against mud.

She thought of the brerr-proof gauntlets, and the disc that spoke both Teseng'i and Kokkonni, and especially of the innocent hump that dispensed copper. Tonight the best story would be hers. First choice would be hers. She was determined that it be.

She thought about the bulge on the suit — how it would feel to squeeze it again and again, the wealth falling into her hand like milk from a teat.

The torqslol story. Yes, definitely the torqslol story. □

Special Interzone Issue¹

I can sense it now as I sit here typing. Eyes boring into my back, venom, anger, frustration. As soon as they pick up a copy of this issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* there will be five otherwise lovely, kindly people who will hate me. Five people who normally only wield a brush or spatula will be reaching for their SCUD missiles. "Why didn't he put my art on the cover?" they'll growl, jamming their thumb onto the launch button.

Before the missiles hit, I have to make a confession. I did want to put their art on the cover. Each and every artist outdid his-, or herself. Each of the six main illustrations done for this issue deserves to be on the cover. Paul Chadwick, David Cherry, Carol Heyer, Bob Eggleton, Larry Blamire, and Robert Pasternak are all cover artists who are devoted enough to their art, and to SF art, to provide superior work for the inconsequential amount we can afford to pay. Picking from all of these illustrations for a cover was an impossible task. I could have thrown all of the illustrations into the air and picked whichever one landed on its side, or back, and the cover would have been just as strong as the one we did choose.

Ever since we started *Aboriginal Science Fiction* with the idea of offering full-color art, we have been working at continually improving, at seeking better and better art, encouraging our artists to do their best.

Cortney Skinner did a terrific cover for the last issue, but his wasn't the only illustration we could have put on the cover.

Unlike art directors in New York who "design" cover layouts, I give the artists a free hand, the only caveat being that they *read* the story. My theory is that talented people who are given a free reign will only have themselves to compete with, their own inner drive to guide their hand. Sure, artists are human beings, sometimes they get buried with work, sometimes they have to rush, sometimes a story just won't spark their imagination. It happens to everyone. Writers call it writer's block, other professions have their own nicknames. But anytime an artist gets stuck, I'm here to listen, to suggest, to let them talk out the hang-up until they realize they knew what to do all along.

This approach only works with talented and responsible people. But

we knew our artists were talented and responsible when we chose them.

In a very real sense, *Aboriginal* has achieved what we set out to do when we proposed to produce the first full-color science fiction magazine.

What better issue to send to *Interzone*, the British SF magazine, than an issue with *cover art* for every story. Just the way it ought to be.

For the stories are what it's all about. And in that department, *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, as demonstrated ably by the fine line-up in this issue, has also been moving steadily ahead, offering better and better fiction for you, our readers.

So hats off to our artists, and a bow to Harlan Ellison, Frederik Pohl, Lawrence Watt-Evans, Lois Tilton, Wil McCarthy, and Gary Mitchell and Mark Clarkson for their sterling efforts in inspiring such fine art with their equally fine words.

Talking about stories ...

Boomerang Awards

And now on to another pleasant topic, our annual Boomerang Awards.

This year you, our readers, chose the following recipients of the Boomerang Award:

Best short story:

"UFO" by Michael Swanwick
Aboriginal SF, Sept-Oct. 1990

Best Poetry:

"To an Android Lover" by Holly Lisle

Aboriginal SF July-August 1990

Best art:

The view of Neptune from Triton, by Bob Eggleton.

Aboriginal SF January-February 1990

And, of course, we offer our congratulations to Kristine Kathryn Rusch for receiving a Nebula Award nomination for her story "Story Child," which appeared in the Sept.-Oct issue of *Aboriginal SF*.

Kristine, by the way, finished just behind Michael Swanwick in the voting for the Boomerang Award.

Congratulations to the winners, and thanks to our readers for making the difficult choices for us. Take care until next issue. □

ADVANCE ANNOUNCEMENT

STEPHEN KING

THE DARK TOWER III: THE WASTE LANDS

We have been inundated with inquiries concerning the third book in Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series. We have had to return deposit checks from collectors concerned about early sell out. We have bowed to the pressure and will accept orders from those who wish to ensure that they will receive a copy of this eagerly awaited hardcover book. **THE DARK TOWER III: THE WASTE LANDS** is currently undergoing revision by Mr. King. It is projected to be about 25% longer than **THE DARK TOWER II: THE DRAWING OF THE THREE**, and contains 12 full color illustrations, including 10 doublepage spreads, by the brilliant artist Ned Dameron. Available in a signed and numbered deluxe edition as well as a limited trade edition.

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1200 copies of the DELUXE edition will be published. These will be **SIGNED** by both author and artist, bound in a heavy, white buckram, slipcased and numbered. If you currently own a numbered copy of the deluxe edition of **THE DRAWING OF THE THREE** you can have the same number of **THE WASTE LANDS** reserved by sending us a copy of the signature page. Price—\$120.00 plus p/h/i (foreign additional). **Your order must reach us by April 27, 1991.**

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All remaining copies will be made available by lottery on May 5th. If you do NOT have a DELUXE edition of **THE DRAWING OF THE THREE**, please advise us if you would like to be included in the lottery. **IF YOU ARE IN THE LOTTERY DO NOT SEND MONEY AT THIS TIME.**

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Amerikano Hiaika

By Wil McCarthy

Art by David Cherry

Sidewalk crowds surged against him as he made his way down the street, and he resisted the urge to grab his head in both hands and scream himself blue. His clothing reeked of sweat and grime and sake, and was dark with accumulated soy-sauce stains. His body was reedy and thin. His brain was a messy Tanner/Geist jumble of thoughts and memories that didn't match up. His narrow arms were aching sore, speckled with punctures and 'derm bruises.

The rage and frustration were hard to fight back. Geist was such a loser! A body like this, not a penny on him, and warrants out for his arrest!

Excuses floated up in his mind, but Tanner repressed them savagely. Billy Geist was the kind of dirtbag to whom shooting up a dose of Tanner seemed like a fun idea, a diverting way to spend the weekend. Tanner intended to see he got his money's worth.

How's this, Billy? he asked himself with naked hatred. *How do you like the pain, the hollow emptiness where Karen used to be? It's like somebody pulling your teeth out, huh?*

He clenched his fists, clenched his teeth, and continued walking despite the need to smash somebody full in the face. The pain and the hollow emptiness were quite simply unbearable. They sliced through his tangled thoughts like razors, driven deep by Tanner's one clear memory, the memory of Karen.

They had been walking together, Nick and Karen Tanner, along the dark streets that led back from Roppongi. He'd been too stinky to spring for a cab, too stupid to take the long way back, and too drunk to worry much about it. He could still hear the sounds: the strange and quiet slap of bare feet running on asphalt, the coarse breathing of a man behind them. Karen's grunt of muddled astonishment as a rigid monofilament whipped through her torso diagonally from kidney to armpit.

Tanner remembered, too, the feeling as his flesh parted, as his neck became almost two separate things. There was a jolt, a flash, an electrical shock as the monowire flickered through his spinal column, but no other pain or discomfort. All that would come later. He had one final memory, though, perhaps the most terrible of all. It was another sound, the dull smack of Karen's top half hitting the pavement.

Things went down tough in Americatown.

Nick's head had lolled over, ragdoll-style, and the street had met him hard. The rest was merciful blackness.

Tanner groped through the crowd, grabbed at a banister. A thin howl escaped him, and tears ran down his face like warmly flowing blood. *Who?* Who was it that had stolen away his wife, ended her existence with a flick of the wrist?

Who did it? *WHO DID IT!!* He tried to keep himself from screaming, but realized he was already doing it.

Nick belted back another Suntory and, with a sigh, set the shotglass down on the bar. He pretty much had his shit together now.

Billy-chan's look of scruffy helplessness had netted him nearly a thousand yen, hustling away salarymen's pocket change as they took their girlfriends and fiancées out for early Saturday dinner. It seemed the more prosperous Nips got a kick out of lording over down-and-out *gaijin*, particularly when they had a female on their arm. *Doda, kakoi daro?*

But he'd about drunk up that thousand, now, and it was time to get down to business.

He looked around him, looked at the lounge decor of mirrors and gray marble, and the blue-collar types trying morosely to enjoy themselves, and the bar girls pushing drinks and smiling their mannequin smiles of abstract welcome. The air was hung with blue garlands of cigarette smoke and the low staccato of murmured Japanese.

This was Osakejo, the bar Nick and Karen had been drinking at before ... before the murder. A block off from the fashionable Roppongi district, and two kilometers south of Americatown, the 'Jo was one of those increasingly rare establishments which catered to Tokyo's working class. No ice cubes mined from millennia-old glaciers, or shrimp snacks wrapped in gold leaf. Not in this joint. But it lacked, too, the sleazy crowds of the waterfront and the bogus down-home good cheer of Americatown. It was a good bar, and Tanner had always liked it. God damn it all to hell.

He picked up the shotglass again and rapped it twice on the bartop. "Hey, Inoue-san!" he said.

Behind the counter, the man named Inoue turned and looked sharply at him. "*Omaesan itai daredane?*" His face bore a strange expression, like a polite sort of contempt. He saw, of course, the filthy scarecrow called Billy Geist, sitting alone on this side of the bar because nobody wanted to get near him.

Tanner bowed his head a little and made a belated attempt to look respectful. This man didn't know him.

"*Sumimasen,*" he offered tentatively. "*Chotto otazune shimasu.*"

Inoue frowned deeply and set down the white cloth he'd been holding. "Question?" he asked with obvious irritation. "I, know, your question, already." (Inoue, like most Japanese, spoke English competently but with infuriating slowness.) "You, want to know, about policeman's, wife, fu was killed, last month."

A feeling of discontinuity settled into Nick's mind. "How did you know that?" he demanded quietly. The shotglass slipped from his fingers, rolled back toward him, disappeared off the edge of the bar. When it smashed on the marble floor, he scarcely noticed.





"*Tikagenhishite kure!*" the bartender snapped, his face reddening. "You, *gaijin*, come here, always dirty. Always, ask, about policeman's wife. *Tanna-san wa koko no otokuisan datta dakeda*. They, were good people. You, go away."

"Go away?" Nick cried. "Why, who else has been here? What's going on?"

Inoue-san, almost purple with rage, reached across the countertop and grabbed the front of Billy-chan's oily gray shirt. "*Wakataru. Deteittekure.*" The barman's voice was a malignant hiss, his words a genuine warning. Get out of here, understand? He gave a hard shove, and Nick rolled backward off his barstool and tumbled to the floor, leading with his left elbow. Pain exploded like a bomb.

Nick scrambled quickly to his feet, and grabbed his left arm in his right. Things were definitely not going as planned. He glowered at Inoue, but even a quick look was enough to tell him the man was seriously, seriously pissed off. With a sick, helpless feeling, Tanner headed for the door, pushed it open with his shoulder, and slipped out into the evening. Like a beaten dog. God damn it! God damn it all to hell and back, he had to fucking be Billy Geist!

He grabbed a signpost, leaned against it, let the passing people brush by him. He inhaled a deep breath, held it. Exhaled. Felt the deep throbbing of his left arm. It was important that he stay cool.

Clearly, he wasn't going to get anywhere until he had a bath and a change of clothing. A haircut wouldn't hurt, but then neither would a few months of proper diet and exercise. Damn it, he was under a death sentence! Geist's liver was working overtime, processing Nick out of the picture. In three days, four at most, he'd be nothing but impurities in Billy-chan's urine.

Hell, he'd wasted enough time already. Cradling his elbow against further harm, he waded into the crowd and headed upstairs.

They cracked him on the head before stuffing him in back of the police car, and the bruise was a hard lump now at the base of his skull.

Poor Billy-chan just couldn't stay out of trouble, you know? The Edoyu bathhouse had been wonderful, fully worth his last two hundred yen. He'd sat on a stool and hosed off weeks worth of grime and sweat, then settled into a bath cranked all the way up to 50 Celsius. The water had boiled away his stiffness and most of his pain, allowing him almost to forget. The trouble came while he was getting dressed. The thought of climbing back into Billy's reeking garments had been less than appealing, but he'd found some much nicer attire in a basket near his, along with a wristwatch, telephone, and wallet. He was slipping on a new pair of shoes, almost ready to go, when somebody started yelling.

Nice timing, Billy.

Neon billboards and particolored streetlights whirled by now, as the cops rode him in. Nick allowed himself a flicker of smugness through his new pain; they'd taken all the stuff out of his pockets, but were in too much of a hurry to remove his new clothes. Somebody at the ol' bathhouse was going home naked, or else in Billy-chan's suit.

His glum mood settled back upon him. He was going to jail! Of all the things that could happen, this was the worst. There was no way His eyes locked on a street

sign, glowing with the pale green and white of solid-state fluorescence. *Jingu-dori Street!* They were taking him to Americatown, then. What else to do with a scrawny, drug-addicted *gaijin*? A trace of hope brought his mind back to life.

Rubber squealed in protest as the cops pulled a tight corner, throwing the handcuffed Tanner sideways, into the door of unyielding ceramic. The side of his face connected solidly. He recovered his balance quickly, but jerked his hands painfully behind him, trying to free one. His cheekbone! Another bruise, probably, for Billy-chan's collection. The desire, the need to touch it, was palpable. *Bastards*, he thought. He could hear their laughter through the opaque, centimeter-thick partition.

He tried to think. Had he ever treated a collar this way? Busted him up, tossed him around like a bale of hay? Images occurred to him, the scuffy faces of a hundred A-town losers, the very lowlife it had been Tanner's job to control. A year ago, what would he have made of Billy Geist?

When the cop car screamed to a halt, Nick was ready for it, leaning back with his feet braced against the partition. They wouldn't get him twice, at least.

The left-side door popped open with a pneumatic *whoomp*, and rough hands grabbed him and hauled him off the seat. The cops, straight downtown types with blue-lacquered samurai armor, each grabbed an arm and hauled him up the front steps of the Americatown *Keisatsu*. "Go easy!" he protested, with Billy-chan's less-than-adamant voice. "*Hanashitekure, you bastards!*"

He was hustled through the airlock and into the reception area. He sighed quietly. The familiarity of this place, the phony wood paneling, the potted palms on either side of the main desk! It was almost like coming home. Across the room he could see his old desk, and all around him were people he knew.

"*Kono otoko ga Edoyu de tanin no fuku to saifu totte irutokoro o tsukamaeta,*" one of the cops told Raymond, the man currently behind the main desk. "*Omaesantachi no mono daro. Tsurete kite yattazo.*"

Here is one of your citizens. Take him.

The two cops threw Tanner to the floor face-down, turned around with almost military precision, and marched out the way they'd come.

"Your mamas," Nick heard Raymond mutter. Then, to Nick: "Well, what are you waiting on? Go on, get up."

New pain, fresh off the grocer's shelf, coursed through Tanner's rented body. He groaned, and struggled up into an awkward kneeling position with his forehead still resting on the floor. Suddenly his wrists were jerked upward violently, and he found himself in a bent-knee standing position. Fire raced up through both arms.

"The man just told you to get up," a voice behind him said. Sounded sort of like Takahumi Smith.

He was led forward, still painfully bent over, until his stomach was resting against the front desk. Raymond had out a pencil and was scribbling in a 340A arrest form. "Place of incident, Edoyu bathhouse, go-san-ichi Takanodai." He looked up from the form. "You stole a man's clothing?"

Raymond's face, so familiar to Nick after their years together, held an alien hardness. His black skin seemed somehow sinister, and his eyes surveyed Nick dispassionately, with no sign of recognition.

"Ray," he said hoarsely. He straightened up. "Ray, it's me. It's Nick Tanner."

A look of tired irritation swept across Raymond's features. Nick glanced over his right shoulder at Takahumi and saw the same expression there, perhaps a little grimmer.

"The man standing behind you is Officer Smith," Raymond said wearily, looking back down at his form. "He's going to remove your handcuffs, and then you're going to place your hands on the glass plate in front of you."

"It's *me*, Raymond," Nick tried. "The guy who whips your butt at racquetball every time. I'm encoded in an overlay drug —" Officer Smith gave the handcuffs a good hard jerk, so the manacle squeezed into Nick's wrists like a narrow vise. "Shut up, you dirtbag. We don't wanna hear it."

Tanner sucked in a sharp breath, but made no sound. He closed his eyes and held out his wrists behind him. After a few excruciating seconds, Takahumi unlocked the cuff and removed it. Blood flowed back into Nick's hands.

"Put your hands on the plate," Raymond instructed with evident disgust, not looking up from his report. Feeling lost, Nick laid his palms out on the cool glass rectangle, straightened out his fingers.

The desk beeped. "Geistu, William R.," it stated in stiff feminine tones, thickly accented. "Two-three-dzero-dzero California Street, capsulu fo-one-nine. Americatown, Tokyo. Prior arrest, foteen. Prior conviction, five, misdeemeanor. Currently wanted for possession of illegal material, criminal nonpayment of housing cost."

Raymond cleared his throat. "Well," he said, still not looking up. "We got us a regular dirtbag. Take him downstairs."

Takahumi took hold of his arm and pulled him away from the desk.

Nick looked at him helplessly. "Smith, come on. It's not all that hard to believe, is it? I mean, you know how well the overlay drugs are selling out there. Seepie, they call it."

Officer Smith said nothing. Tanner's eyes fell on a familiar figure as he was led through the main office. "Dave!" he called out, holding his hands out before him like the heroine in a silent melodrama.

The man, Dave Huntington, turned around, raised his eyebrows. "Billy-chan!" he said, with a tone of delighted contempt. "Hey, nice to see you again, you little fuckup!"

Nick recoiled, his head spinning with contradictions. It was not only Nick Tanner who had strong memories of Dave. Dave was the beat cop around the Best Eastern hotel where Billy lived, and had arrested him no less than four times! What an asshole!

Takahumi dragged him through the room at a steady, unrelenting pace. Dave fell into the background. The "dungeon" staircase loomed.

Nick felt himself on the verge of angry tears. "What's going on here, Takahumi? Why won't you guys listen to me?"

"Downstairs," was the man's only reply. He pushed lightly on Tanner's shoulder, indicating that he, Tanner, should go first. He did so, descending the staircase in sulky silence. Once downstairs, he turned to face Takahumi, to look into his eyes and see what was going on there.

"Listen to me," he insisted, trying to overpower Billy-chan and speak as much like Nick Tanner as possible. "I'm your friend Nick Tanner. I've had my personality encoded in a CPO narcotic. This guy" (he rapped his chest with the fingers of both hands) "took a dose of it. I have two, three days left in here before I start wearing off, and —"

"I know all about it," Takahumi stated, pulling a key-ring off his belt. He pointed at an empty cage. "Over there. Come on."

Nick stood his ground. "Listen to me! I'm trying to find the killer, okay? Was I supposed to rot there in the hospital for the rest of my life? Some bastard is walking around this city, and he murdered my Karen!"

Something passed briefly across Takahumi's face, a trace of sympathy, perhaps. But it vanished, and a stony anger took its place. "I don't want to hear another word out of you, okay? Nick Tanner was crazy when he died, not that I blame him. But you, you are a punk drug addict loser, and you have taken a drug that makes you walk and talk like a crazy Nick Tanner."

"And do you think you're the only one? Christ and Buddha, man, we get five of you in here every goddamn day! You're a regular one-man crime wave!"

Tanner took a step back, let himself fall dizzily against the cinderblock wall. Five of him every day? He *had* thought he was the only one. He was *the* Nick Tanner, right?

"Smith, it is me." There was an edge of hysteria in his voice. "I'm Nick Tanner!"

Takahumi snorted. "It's going around, buddy. You'll get over it." He jingled his keys and nodded in the direction of the empty jail cell.

"Officer Smith!" The voice echoed down sharply from the staircase, accompanied by the rapid slap of leather-soled shoes. A figure appeared in the archway, then stepped out into the light. A man in gray businesswear, white shirt, red tie. Hair greased back. A typical A-town lawyer, in other words.

"Officer Smith," the man announced crisply. "This person is to be remanded into my custody. I believe your instructions on this were quite clear."

Takahumi grunted, looking troubled. "Are you still here?"

"Yes," the attorney replied with a snarl. "I'm still here, and I intend to stay here until this crisis is resolved. The D.A.'s office has given me full authority to pursue the matter."

"So I turn these guys over to you. What happens then? You let them go? These are dangerous people, mister!"

"Yes, so you've told me." The lawyer turned toward Tanner. "Mr. Geist, my name is Rodriguez. I'm the public defender assigned to your case. Computer set bail on you two minutes ago, and I've put down a conditional bond. Are you prepared to behave yourself if I assume custody of you?"

"Uh, sure," Nick agreed, thoroughly confused. As a rule, the wheels of justice turned slowly. Why would a city attorney take such unusual steps on his behalf?

"Well," Rodriguez said, smiling politely. "Let's go, then."

He pointed an arm up the dark staircase, like a butler showing a guest to his room, and Tanner mounted the stairs and climbed. The echo of Rodriguez's expensive shoes followed him up.

"I better not catch him again!" Takahumi called up after them. "I better not catch any of 'em, Mr. Rodriguez, or it's your ass! You hear me?"

They walked out of the station in silence, and Tanner found himself ushered into Rodriguez's car. The lawyer climbed into the driver's seat, started the engine, and pulled out into the nighttime traffic.

"Here," he said, tossing something into Nick's lap. A Manila envelope.

Nick looked at it, startled, more puzzled than ever. He felt as though he were walking in a dream, the sort of dream where the scenery is constantly shifting, where doors open magically for you and slam behind you when you go through. "What is it?" he managed to ask.

Rodriguez glanced at him and smiled. "Relax. You're Nick Tanner, right?" He stuck out a hand. "Me too. Nice to meet you."

Nick stared at the hand. "What are you talking about?" "Whoops!" the lawyer replied, retracting the hand to steer around a mini-scooter. "I hate those things. They ought to make a special lane for them or something, you know?"

Nick knew. Scooter drivers behaved for all the world as if they wanted you to wipe them out. And of course, about nineteen times a day somebody did. Number one cause of fatality in Tokyo.

"Anyway, welcome to the Old Boy Network," Rodriguez continued. "What's going on is that I'm the Nick Tanner in charge of recruitment, and you're the Nick Tanner who's just been recruited. I'm glad I caught you; we've got enough mavericks in this city now to fill a subway car."

"Mavericks," Nick said. He was beginning to catch on. "You mean like me, running around trying to solve things on my own. You've got some kind of coordinated effort going?"

"Right!" Rodriguez agreed, slapping the steering wheel. "We've got about fifty of us working together on it, and things are starting to fall into place. We have a witness who says the killer was a short man wearing black clothing. After the murder he ran down *Azabu-dori*. He threw the monowire sword away in a trash can near the corner of *Azabu-dori* and *Jingu-dori*, and we've lifted a set of partial fingerprints off it."

"Fingerprints!" Nick exclaimed. "What kind of amateur leaves fingerprints?"

"We're not sure," Rodriguez answered. He was silent for a few moments as he negotiated a turn. "The prints seem kind of strange, and we're having them checked out. They may be some kind of trick to make us think the killer was an amateur. Anyway, we have a few leads we're following up. We've got people talking to the Yakuza all over town."

Nick frowned. "Wait. This is all happening too fast, I need to think. This sounds real organized. Where do I fit in?"

"Well (another pause as Rodriguez pulled onto California Street), that's not up to me. You'll find your instructions in that envelope there, along with a hundred thousand yen and a telephone number. Call in four times a day, and again any time you find something important. You can call if you have a question, too, but your job isn't to know everything. Okay?"

"Uh, sure," Nick said. He paused. "I, uh, I don't have a telephone, by the way."

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"Take mine," Rodriguez told him, fishing in his suit pocket. He pulled out a black plastic case, about the size of an old cassette tape, and handed it to Nick. "I'll pick up another one in the morning."

"Expensive one," Nick observed, slipping it into his shirt pocket. The dreamy feeling was retreating, reality was asserting itself. It was funny, really, the way strange things started to seem normal after a while.

The car slowed, pulled over against the row of parked vehicles on the left side. Rodriguez put it in park. People honked angrily behind them, gave up and drove around. Traffic in the opposite lane protested briefly. Outside the window, a flashing sign announced: Best Eastern Hotel. Low Rates. Vacancy.

"What are we doing here?" Nick asked. Surely, this couldn't have anything to do with the investigation.

Rodriguez shrugged. "You live here, right?"

"I used to," Nick replied without thinking. "I, I mean Billy-chan used to. Got kicked out for not paying the bill."

"So pay it. You look dead, my friend. I imagine you've had a tough day, and I'd advise you to get some sleep."

Nick started. "Sleep! You're crazy, I'll be dead in three days! I've got to get working!" He paused. Working. What a frightful euphemism that was. What he really meant, of course, was that he had to go track down the man who'd sliced his wife in half. The thought was like an icicle through his heart. His eyes filled with sudden tears, and he choked back a sob.

"Whoa," Rodriguez said softly, putting a hand on Nick's shoulder. "Easy does it. I know how you feel, Nick. I know. But you've got to get hold of it. Channel it."

Nick wiped an eye with the heel of his hand, sniffed. "It's okay. It's under control."

Rodriguez nodded. "Yeah." A pause. "In the envelope there, you'll find another dose of the CPO. That, plus your current dose, ought to last you through the week. Buy another hit when you can. You'll be okay."

Another dose! Nick clutched the envelope tightly to him. It hadn't occurred to him that he could prolong the overlay. "Thanks," he said, his voice almost a whisper. His deadline was gone. Suddenly, he felt very tired.

"Don't mention it," Rodriguez looked out through the window at the car parked beside them. "Have you got room to squeeze out?"

Nick tried the door. It opened about half a meter. "Yes," he answered. A thought occurred to him. "Hey, what makes a public attorney like you want to take a personality overlay drug, anyway?"

It was an important question. The RNA extraction process was lethal, so that any overlay personality was, by definition, suicidal. Who would want somebody like that driving his body around for three days?

Rodriguez shook his head. "Search me, Nick, I only work here. CPO is the hottest thing since designer cocaine, and I'll be damned if I know why. Look, I have to get back to the police station now. Take care of yourself, okay?"

"Sure," Nick said, getting out of the car. "Keep in touch."

He slammed the door. The car pulled into the flow of traffic and was swept away.

head up on creaking neck muscles and looked around him. The room was a small, windowless triple-capsule, its fitfully backlit ceiling barely a meter above his nose. He himself was sprawled on a ragged futon, with dingy gray-white sheets tangled about his feet. And on the sheet, he noted, there sat a brown spider almost as large as a 500-yen coin.

He kicked the sheets away with a shriek of disgust. Jesus and Buddha, he hated spiders. *They crawl on your face when you're asleep, and drink out of the corners of your eyes.* That was what his mother used to say, back when they lived in San Diego ...

No, that wasn't right. Nick had never lived in the United States. It was Billy-chan who hated spiders, who had lived with his mother in southern California. *Go away*, he thought harshly. He was Tanner, dammit. Until he ran out of drugs he was god-damned Nick Tanner.

Nick heaved himself out of bed, groaning. His body was a mass of hurt, each injury calling out loudly for his attention. He ignored them and duck-walked over to the tiny sink beside the door. The water, when he turned it on, was just a lukewarm trickle, but he cupped both hands under the flow, and splashed some on his face and chest. Aah. That was almost refreshing.

He grabbed his shirt from the floor of synthami mats, pulled it over his head.

The Manila envelope seemed to stare at him from its place beside his pillow. He leaned over and grabbed it, spilling its contents out on the floor in front of him. Cash (a wrapped bundle of it, like you saw in banks, and in crime movies), a map of the city with highlighter marks on it, a sealed foil packet (looking for all the world like a drug-store condom), a typed note, and a business card. UNIVERSAL EXPORTS, the card read. TEL. 3-45-7659.

He took out his telephone and dialed.

It rang twice. There was a click. "Go ahead," a deep, unfamiliar voice instructed him.

"Number two, this is, uh," (he checked the note) "number seventy-three."

There was a pause. "Welcome to the network, seventy-three. What's your status?"

Nick cracked a smile. Like any good Americatown citizen, he had a love for cloak-and-dagger secrecy. There was, even among expatriate Americans, a sort of nostalgia for the Cold War, for the days of spy satellites and James Bond movies. He could already understand the network implicitly. Number two was the man in charge (number one being the original Tanner, now deceased), the man who remained perpetually in hiding while he assimilated data from his agents.

At least, that's what Nick would do if he were running things.

"Well," he said, clearing away this irrelevant line of thought, "I'm supposed to head for the Shibuya district to talk with somebody named Brady Calhoun. He's some kind of data pirate."

"Okay," number two replied. "Right. This Calhoun, he isn't a suspect, but he may be able to help us find one. Understand?"

"Sure."

"Okay, then. Keep in touch, seventy-three."

The line went dead. Nick switched off his phone, tucked it away, and gathered his things together. He quickly relieved himself in the sink, a filthy but common habit

His eyes peeled open with a dry stickiness, like magic tape coming off the roll. Painfully, he raised his

here in lower A-town, where the bathroom was usually a ways down the hall, and sometimes down the street. He took a deep breath, held it, released it. He slid open the door, which squealed in its tracks, and stepped out into the world.

He almost broke his arm falling out of the doorway; Billy-chan's room was on the higher of two levels on this floor. Many of the other capsule rooms were open, and heads poked out from several of these. Further down the hall, a group of scruffy men engaged in a quiet game, handing cards back and forth across the ridiculously narrow hallway. Startled by the hollow thud as Nick slammed into the plastic floor, they looked up sharply, then burst out laughing.

"Ooh, Billy-chan. Wrong side of the bed?" one of them baby-talked at him, breaking out in a fresh peal of laughter.

"Che, *bakanishiyagate*," Nick muttered in the man's direction. He picked himself up and headed for the ladder at the opposite end of the hall. Downstairs, he confronted the hotel's clerk, a surly-looking *nihon-jin* named Akemi. "I'm going out," he offered darkly. "I want the same room back tonight, *wakata?*"

Akemi nodded unpleasantly. She had no love for Billy-chan, but his bill was paid, now, through the end of the month. That was more than could be said for most of the Best Eastern's residents.

It was raining outside, the dreary, unvaryingly oppressive drizzle of Japan's early summer. Nick stole an umbrella from the rack out front and merged with the light Sunday morning crowd.

The worst thing about the rain, Nick reflected, was that it gave no sign that it was ever going to end. It might continue, with dull uniformity, for a week or more. The second worst thing, of course, was the fact that the *nihon-jin*, almost universally short, held their umbrellas at perfect eye level. Even here at the edge of Americatown, the sidewalk was an ever-shifting porcupine of sharp umbrella spines, any one of which could blind him at any moment.

Along with three hundred other people, he crossed a street that was two centimeters deep in water, flowing like a minor river. Then he joined a crowd of fifty or so in descending the waterfall/stairs of the subway station.

The line at the ticket machines was long, though thankfully the floor was dry (all the water ran down into the tracks, where it formed a subterranean sea almost ten centimeters deep). After a wait of well over fifteen minutes, Nick was finally at the machine. He fed in a 10,000-yen bill, quickly grabbed his ticket, and pocketed an awkward handful of change.

"*Chotto sumimasen*," he said, forcing his way through several other lines. "*Saki-ni gomen-ne*." His train was already here, and it was not planning to wait for him! He dropped his ticket into the ticket-taker (having held it for less than 30 seconds, he wondered, not for the first time, why they didn't just eliminate the ticket and save everybody a lot of time), pushed forward, and squeezed onto the train just as the doors were closing. Luckily, it wasn't a weekday morning rush hour. He could almost breathe.

He pressed the door buzzer again, starting to become worried. Shibuya was a nice part of town, even if it

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had declined somewhat this past decade. Plenty to do around here. What if Brady Calhoun was out somewhere?

Nick had no contingency plans, no useful way to spend his time if Calhoun wasn't home.

The door jerked open in front of him. "*Nananda!*" a sleepy-looking, bathrobed apparition demanded.

"Uh, Mr. Calhoun," Nick began. "Sorry if I woke you. I'd like to ask you a few questions."

Calhoun emitted a sharp bark, like an aborted attempt at laughter, and looked Billy-chan's wiry frame up and down. "You would, huh? Well, I'd like to smash you one in the mouth. What say we both give up and call it even?"

He started to slam the door, and Tanner stuck Billy-chan's foot in the frame at the last moment. A lance of pain shot up through his leg, but the door remained open. Calhoun started leaning on it heavily.

"*Sumimasen*," Nick hissed through the crack in the door. "*Ashiga itaindagane*. Open the goddamn door."

"Get out of here, man," Calhoun warned, an edge of fear on his voice. "I'll cut your foot off."

"*Chotto kikitakotoga, arunda* Mr. Calhoun," Nick insisted. "Two thousand yen for a minute of your time."

Calhoun eased up on the door, allowing the white fire in Nick's foot to cool down a bit. "Throw the money inside and pull your foot out."

Tanner complied, and the door promptly slammed shut. Right. Fury rose within him. He was about to pound the door until it dented, when he heard the sound of the ball-and-hook police bar being opened. The door swung wide.

"You sure ain't a cop," Calhoun told him, scratching his unshaved chin in puzzlement. "And you sure ain't a yakuza. The meter is running, what's your question?"

Nick cleared his throat. His anger needed a moment to disperse. "Um, there was a cop killed last month off Roppongi. An American."

"Yeah, I remember. Him and his wife. It was in the paper."

"Right," Nick agreed, cheeks flushing, throat constricting as he felt a little part of himself die. Karen! "That's right. My name is Geist, and that cop, uh, was sort of a friend of mine. I understand you're in, uh, the information business, and my question is whether you can locate information pertaining to, uh, this incident."

A smile, like that of a monitor lizard, broke out on Brady Calhoun's face. "Well, a *friend* of yours, was he? You slip him a little cash, he slips you a little get out of jail card, eh? *Real friendly*, like."

Nick sighed. "The answer to my question is?"

"One million yen," Calhoun stated, his smile vanishing. "Half now, half when I dig out your clues."

Nick blinked, nonplussed. A million yen, huh? He wondered how long it might take him to get that kind of money together. How extensive were the network's resources? How important was this line of inquiry?

An idea popped into his mind. "Brady," he said, shaking his head sadly, "don't do that, okay? I know you're pretty tight right now, but don't squeeze me. I'll give you twenty thousand yen, all up front."

Calhoun looked startled, then angry. "Twenty thousand! You couldn't kiss my ass for twenty thousand!"

"Couldn't I?" Tanner asked. He held his expression neutral. "The hacking game isn't like it used to be. Business is slow, I know that. The payoff isn't so high, now."

You used to be one of the greats, Brady, something really special, but society is shifting out from under you. You're like the carbon-paper king, watching while Xerox machines flatten your empire. It's too bad, really. How about I give you thirty thousand."

He watched Calhoun's face carefully. He knew nothing about the data piracy business, and had never heard of Brady before reading his instruction sheet last night. His verbal assault had been based on guesswork and supposition, on things he thought he might have heard somewhere. That banks were numbering their imaginary dollars these days, so any transaction could be traced. If he were off the mark, though, he'd have an angry and alienated Brady to deal with. And he'd be just that much farther from finding Karen's killer.

Bright hatred flashed in Calhoun's eyes and was gone. The man looked hollow, suddenly, lost and afraid. "Fifty thousand," he said quietly, his eyes dropping. "Thirty up front."

"Deal," Nick concurred. "How long do you need?"

"Come back in five hours."

"Okay," Nick fished three bills out of his pocket and handed them over. He stepped away from the door.

"You're a dirty bastard, Mr. Geist," Calhoun said empty. "Do you know what it's like to lose your whole world? Do you?"

Nick Tanner turned away. "I'll see you in five hours," he said.

He took the elevator down, left the building, and headed immediately for a ramen shop across the street. Jesus and Buddha, he was *starving*.

A bowl of pork ramen was soon presented to him, and he tossed a 500-yen coin across the counter and set in with a vengeance. The noodles were fine, rich but not soggy, and the meat and vegetables were cooked to perfection. A radio was playing softly behind him somewhere, and the music was *Amerikano Hiaika*, the American Blues. Hopelessly out of date, the stuff barely sold anymore, but its soothing, melancholy tones had always been a comfort to Nick. He let the music slide through him while the ramen's steamy broth warmed him against the rain. *Ah, Tokyo*, he thought, glad for the moment to be where he was.

The whole bowl, more than a liter of soup, was gone in five minutes. Nick considered ordering another bowl, but Billy-chan's shrivelled stomach groaned at the thought. Geist was not used to eating often or well, preferring to spend his free cash on euphorin and hallucinols. Just lately, too, the euphorin was becoming a problem; his dosage got higher every time, in the "suicide curve" that rose exponentially toward toxic levels. Still, that particular drug was U.S.-certified as nonaddictive, so he could always quit if he wanted to.

Sighing, he got up, retrieved his umbrella from the rack, and strode out into the drizzle again.

Almost five hours to kill. What was the most useful thing he could do with that time? Rodriguez had said the network was talking to the yakuza all over town. Presumably, that meant the Americatown Mafia as well. Calhoun was looking into the city's data net. All the witnesses were accounted for, and stopping strangers on the street hardly seemed productive.

He ducked into a narrow alley and got out his phone.

"Go ahead," the now-familiar voice of number two told

him after he'd dialed.

"Number two," Nick answered, "this is number seventy-three. I made a deal with Brady Calhoun. He's going to do some snooping around for us. He told me it would take five hours, though."

"Understood," number two said. "You need something to do."

"Right," Nick replied. How convenient it was to deal with *yourself* over the phone. There was no confusion, no need to explain anything.

Number two spoke again: "You're in Shibuya now, right? I want you to look around, see if you can find a dealer." He meant a CPO dealer with a supply of Nick Tanner. "We don't have one in that district yet. If you can't find one, head over to the Ginza and buy yourself a hit from Fat Charlie."

"Understood," said Nick. "Will I know him when I see him?"

"*Hai, sugu wakarusu.* He's pretty easy to spot. Keep in touch, seventy-three."

Nick switched off the phone.

Stepping back out into the street, he scanned the crowds with a critical eye. He was looking for somebody relaxed, somebody just sort of hanging out while the high-strung mobs brushed by. Somebody well dressed, but a little seedy-looking. Most of all, he was looking for somebody Caucasian.

It was the shame of the Western Hemisphere that over ninety-five percent of drug-related crimes in Tokyo were committed by white Americans. That Americatown had more crime per capita than any other place in Japan, over six times the national average. That more people were killed there every month than in the entire province of Osaka. This was a particular, burning shame to Nick Tanner, who loved A-town dearly, had lived there his entire life. He was a cop there, entrusted with the job of keeping the lowlife in check, knowing full well that he was unequal to the task. The robbers outnumbered the cops a thousand to one.

His eyes tracked up and down the street like the sensors of an autonomous weapon. He found no target. The people here were all *Nihon-jin*, moving hurriedly from one place to the next. Spending even their Sundays like rats in a maze.

Nick pocketed the phone and moved on.

This was really the wrong part of town to look for drugs in, he decided after a few hours. *Gaijin* were few and far between, and in Shibuya they were all Japanized folk, scurrying around like everyone else. *Tamago*, such people were called in Americatown. Eggs: white on the outside, yellow on the inside.

Eventually he gave up and took the train to the Ginza. He walked up and down the blocked-off-for-Sunday street twice, until his shoes were filled with chilly rainwater and his pant legs were wet up to the knee. When he finally spotted Fat Charlie, though, there was no mistaking him. An overweight American in a white, three-piece suit, the man might as well have carried a sign reading "Dope For Sale."

Fat Charlie was standing beneath an awning, glancing over a rack of soggy magazines, when Nick pulled up next to him.

"Nice day out, huh?" Nick offered.

The white-suited man turned and looked at Nick, polite

surprise registering on his face. An I-don't-know-you-but-you-seem-friendly-enough look. "I suppose it could be," he said. His voice was deep and hoarse, the low rattle of cigar-ravaged throat and lungs.

Nick nodded, approving, at least, of this man's style. "You're Charlie, right?"

The man made a noise that was either a chuckle or a cough. "My friends call me *Fat Charlie*. I'm not quite sure why."

"Got any euphorin?" Nick heard himself ask.

"Ahem. Let's, ah, let's lower our voices, shall we?"

"I'm sorry," Nick said, shaking his head a little. Where had that come from? "I didn't mean euphorin. I meant seepee. Have you got any seepee?"

Fat Charlie looked uncomfortable. "Shall we take a walk? Someplace a bit more private, perhaps?"

Tanner nodded. "Sure. Lead the way. I'm looking for a specific overlay, though. Name is Nick Tanner. Can you help me out there?"

"Oh," Fat Charlie exclaimed quietly. He had just opened his umbrella, but now he pulled it closed again. "I am sorry, but somebody just bought my entire stock of ... of that. That was about fifteen minutes ago."

"What!" Tanner cried, loudly, causing Fat Charlie to wince. Somebody had bought his entire stock? Some small-time dealer, hoping for a quick buck? A maverick Tanner, laying in a year's supply? God damn it all.

"I am sorry," Fat Charlie repeated, with a tone of finality.

Nick shrugged. "Popular item, I guess."

He popped open his umbrella and rejoined the waves of Ginza shoppers. He had a bad feeling, suddenly. What if the CPO was difficult to find, not just today but every day? What if the investigation simply tapered away, for lack of Tanners to carry it out?

He took out his telephone and dialed up Universal Exports.

"Go ahead," an unfamiliar voice answered.

A chill ran through Tanner's body. "Who is this?" he demanded.

"This is number five," the strange voice answered.

"Number two is missing, I don't know where he is. Who is this?"

Nick ducked his head aside to avoid the murderous spines of somebody's umbrella. "This is number seventy-three," he said. "What happened to number two? Did he get arrested?"

"No," the voice replied impatiently in his hand. "I already checked. Do you have any information to report?"

"Yes, I do. I just checked with Fat Charlie on the Ginza, and he says somebody bought up his whole stock a few minutes ago. He doesn't have any more."

Nick heard the voice of "number five" sigh tiredly. "Thirty-eight just told me the same thing about one of our waterfront dealers. Something's going down here, seventy-three — I think we're in trouble. Some of the guys haven't called since this morning."

"We lose people all the time, you know. Somebody wakes up straight one day, and we never hear from him again. Stuff like that. But this is different. I'm worried."

Nick's heart was racing. What had happened to number two? Was there genuine cause for alarm here? "I, uh, I'm going back to Brady Calhoun's place," he said into the phone. "I'll probably be late as it is. Do you have things

under control?"

"Sure," said number five, a little too quickly. "No problem. Keep in touch, seventy-three."

"Yeah, take care." Nick replied, hanging up. He forced calmness into his thoughts. There might or might not be something to worry about. Knowing his own flair for drama, he couldn't be sure number five wasn't making a big deal about nothing. Then again, he trusted his own instincts, and number five's instincts were his own

He pushed the thought away. He'd stay alert, but even if something big were happening, there was little he could do but play out his part.

The walk to the train station, and the train ride itself, seemed interminably long. The rain seemed a cruel taunt, aimed directly at him. *Life is hopeless*, the rain said. *Life is a grim discomfort leading inexorably to death*. The crowds seemed to fight him, part of a deliberate conspiracy to slow him down.

He was over an hour late when he hit the buzzer on Brady Calhoun's door again.

This time, Calhoun opened the door after only a brief pause. He was still dressed in his bathrobe. "Come in, Mr. Geist," he invited, smiling the same reptilian smile Nick had seen earlier. *Won't you step into my parlor* "Come on in and have a beer with me!"

Nick stepped through the doorway, closed the door behind him. He moved with an underwater slowness. Something strange was in the air.

"I think you'll be interested in what I've found," Calhoun went on, as Tanner stepped out of his sodden tennis shoes and up onto the apartment's floor. His feet left wet, squiggly sock marks on the carpeting. "Come on in, sit down. I've been waiting for you!"

The apartment was a single room, divided into kitchen, bedroom, and living-room regions through the placement of furniture alone. The bathroom was an upright cubicle, almost like a telephone booth, in the corner of the room. Brady led him over to the kitchen table handed him a beer. They sat.

"What did you find?" Nick asked carefully. His guard was up, but he wanted to appear as casual as he could. What was wrong? He couldn't quite put a finger on it.

Calhoun scooped up a pile of papers, flipped over the top one. "News briefs," he beamed. "I took a look at the crime. Not a very professional job. Your police friend didn't die until two weeks ago. That rules out organized crime, I think. And it couldn't be a robbery, right? The victims' personal effects were found with them. Maybe it was a random crime, I thought. Doesn't give me a lot to go on, so fuck it. I decide to check the corporate angle."

"And what do I find? Well, it seems our friend Officer Tanner was involved in an investigation last year. Something about a stock deal, something about the Funada corporation. Nothing very big. No conclusions drawn."

Nick remembered that investigation, in the offhand way that you remember trivial things. A Funada executive had sold a block of stock to a blind holding company at well below the market price. Nothing illegal there, but it was unusual enough to provoke a brief inquiry from the Government Ethics Department. And, as Calhoun had indicated, no evidence of wrongdoing was uncovered. No conclusions were drawn.

"Okay so far?" Calhoun asked impatiently.

The man seemed inordinately proud of himself, and

Tanner nodded, also impatient for the story to continue.

"Well," Calhoun expanded, "that oughta be the end of it, right? But I notice, all of a sudden, all sorts of memos being passed around the high levels of the Funada corporation with Nick Tanner's name on them. There were some other names, too, some government people involved in that investigation. But we're mainly concerned with Officer Tanner, *neh?*"

"On May eleventh, your good friend Tanner and his wife were attacked. And those memos stopped going around! Just like that! Tanner didn't realize it, but he'd stuck his hand in a hornet's nest, and the hornets stung him, after a while. Funada was spreading cash around in the government, man, just spreading it around like peanut butter on a piece of bread. And they thought Tanner knew about it!"

Nick reeled back under the impact of these statements. Could all this be true? Would they really kill people over something like that?

Calhoun flipped over another sheet, one which bore a smudged color-laser hardcopy of a man's picture. "This is a personnel photo from Funada's files. The man is Toshio Fujiwara. He works on the loading dock at Funada Tower downtown. He called in sick for a whole week, starting the Monday after the attack. A week after that, the decimal point slips two places on his paycheck and the computer fails to catch the error. This here's the guy that popped your friend, man, this is *him*."

Nick was speechless. His mind was not assimilating this data. He saw the face in the picture, but found it impossible to connect with anything. How could the man who killed Karen have a face like that? How could he have a face?

"While I'm snooping around," Calhoun continued mercilessly, like a boxer who rammed and rammed at his opponent's chest, refusing him a chance to breathe, "I notice how far out on a limb Funada's gone with some of their financing operations. They've got a room full of adaptive neural nets over there, doing an operation called 'computing short.' They're over there cranking out next year's tax returns, using virtual calculations based on an algorithm that isn't written yet. That's cutting-edge AI, man, that's like five years ahead of its time. For the goddamn taxes!"

Tanner's mouth hung open, his face frozen in something like horror. He had virtually stopped listening. His eyes were locked on the image of Toshio Fujiwara. Could it be true? *Could it?*

With an effort, he shifted his gaze to Calhoun's face. The man was grinning like a snake, his eyes as flat and lifeless as if they were painted on.

"I burned them, Nick. I gave them an algorithm."

Nick. Calhoun had said his name. "How did you know my name?" he asked, his voice registering no surprise. Nothing could surprise him any more. "I didn't tell you my name."

Brady Calhoun shrugged, still grinning. "I looked at the police records, you know? And I found all these references to seepee-heads being released into the custody of one Milo Rodriguez, public defender. Every one of them claimed to be Nicholas Tanner. Every last stinking one of them, including William R. Geist, aka Billy-chan. It's you, man, you're investigating your own murder!"

Things came together in Nick's mind. All of a sudden

his confusion was gone. His grief was gone, his suspicions and worries and questions gone, plowed under by the *certainty* of the thought that had occurred to him. "You sold me out," he said quietly. "Once you got my name, you sold it right back to Funada, didn't you?"

Brady looked afraid for half a moment, but the reptile quickly reassured itself. "What are you talking about?"

Tanner smiled wanly and threw his unopened beer can into Brady's face. It impacted solidly, just above the nose, and fell away. The data pirate had barely flinched, but he screamed now and fell back against the refrigerator, grabbing his face in his hands. Blood trickled out between his fingers.

Tanner grabbed the edge of the table and lifted, flipping the whole thing over on its side. He stood up, took his chair in his hands, raised it. He took a step forward. "Talk to me, Brady!" he shrieked, all his accumulated rage now coming to a head as he brandished the chair. "Tell me what you did!"

"No, man!" Calhoun cried in shock and terror. "Don't hit me! Oh Jesus don't hit me with that!" He held his hands before him, pleadingly, while blood streamed from his nose and left eyelid.

"Why did you do it!" Tanner screamed. "Why!"

Calhoun wailed like a harpooned seal. "You only offered me fifty thousand, man! I brought Funada to its knees in an hour and a half, and I told them you did it. They coughed up eight million for a list of names and addresses. I'll split it with you! Right down the middle!"

Eight million yen. Nick lowered the chair a bit. "They'll kill you, Calhoun. They'll kill anyone. They killed my wife, and she didn't even know anything!"

"No!" Brady insisted, a pathetic hopefulness creeping into his voice. "I wrote a deadman loop into the data net! The whole story gets dumped to the papers if anything happens to me!"

"To the papers? Are you sure?"

"I'm sure! I'm sure!"

Tanner broke the chair over Brady's head and ran like hell.

By midnight, he was back in Americatown. He felt a helpless terror, a sense of certain doom upon his return. And yet, the only place he could go, the only place he could *guarantee* an encounter with the people who had killed Karen, was back home.

He had lost the Manila envelope in his headlong flight. He'd probably left it in Brady's kitchen. His seepie was in there, his personality overlay, his very soul! He was a dead man without it, yet he didn't dare go back. He'd be deadlier if he went back.

It was war out there. He'd called up Universal Exports, and number six had answered. Number five was dead. Six was in the middle of something, though, and had no time to talk. Nick had tried again a half hour later, but this time he got no answer.

A few hours after that, he'd thrown away the phone on some vague suspicion that they could use it to locate him. The radio said that two rival gangs of *gaijin* mafia were fighting tonight, all over the city, that at least twenty people had already been killed and more violence was expected.

What was being accomplished here? he wondered. He'd set out to solve a murder, and had ended up committing

one. Now murders were happening all over Tokyo, people were dying who would otherwise be alive, who would still be merrily going about their business if it weren't for Nick Tanner. He'd set a lethal domino-chain in motion, and it was still going, cascading its way through the nighttime city. If they weren't his dominoes, was it still his fault?

Was any of it his fault?

Now he sat huddled in the corner of Billy-chan's room, clutching the gas pistol he'd pleaded for with the last of his cash, waiting for the door to open. He wished he could turn out the lights, but with the advent of true cold fusion the Japanese had found it cheaper to build poor-man's housing without the benefit of off switches. The ceiling glowed with the fitful, eternal light of solid-state fluorescence.

Yes, the dark would be nice. Not only would he be better hidden, better able to take down his enemies without being taken down himself. No, he'd also like it because it would free him from the horrible familiarity, the *hominess* of the triple-cap. Billy-chan's triple-cap. Could it happen so soon? Could Geist's drug-acclimated liver be cleaning out the last of him already?

The door squeaked.

It squealed open, suddenly, and a dark figure appeared in the doorway. He was ready for it, and he shot it. He heard a muted, muffled scream, watched droplets of bright blood patter across the *synthami*. The figure fell back, but he shot it again, and when it fell out of view he fired at an angle through the wall. He fired again, and again, and once again, until the gun was empty.

Tears welled up in his eyes, streamed down his cheeks. It had been Toshio Fujiwara, of course. He didn't have to look to know that. It *had* to be Toshio Fujiwara.

That would close the circle, that would avenge Karen's death. That would avenge Nick Tanner's death. That would be justice.

Justice was one more body on the heap, yes sir. Things went down tough in Americatown.

His voice bubbled up through his tears, but instead of the deep howl he'd expected, he found himself singing:

*Haru ga kita, haru ga kita,
Doko ni kita?
Yama ni kita, sato ni kita,
No ni mo kita!*

He hugged his knees and rocked-himself like a child, for this was a children's song. A happy spring song, but sad too, and deeply moving in its own way. It had always been Billy-chan's favorite. □

Moving?

If you plan to move, please let us know at least 45 days in advance of the mailing of the next issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* to make sure you don't miss any issues. That may seem awfully far in advance, but it takes about 45 days between the time we ship the mailing labels and the magazine's arrival at your home. For the July-August 1991 issue, we need to know if you are moving by April 15, 1991. Thanks.

To the Readers of *Interzone* (and Our Regular Readers)



Greetings. I am sure this issue has come as quite a surprise to some of you. In American popular music of the 1960s, there was something we called the British Invasion. Well, here in the science fiction magazines of the '80s we seem to have the American invasion, if only for one issue.

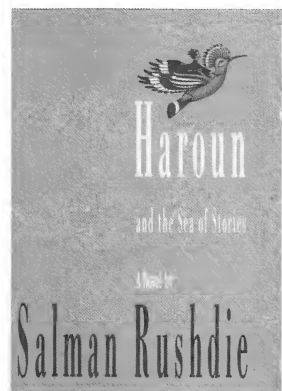
I hope you'll stay with us. That's our Noble Editor's intention, of course. We hope you'll want to go on reading *Aboriginal SF* even after *Interzone* has turned back into *Interzone*. (And we're hoping that the reverse is true. *Interzone* is already highly respected by American fans, but its distribution is limited.)

I might as well introduce myself, then. I am the author of some stories and novels — British readers may know me best as a contributor to *Fear and Fantasy Tales* — and I edit *Weird Tales*. I have also, incidentally, been writing a review column of some sort for fourteen years now, starting in Richard Geis's *Science Fiction Review* in 1976. My usual custom has been to start off these columns with an essay of some sort, which then leads into the reviews.

Writing for *Interzone* inevitably makes me think of the differences between British and American SF magazines. I am more thoroughly familiar with the British ones than most Americans, I suppose — all the way back to *Tales of Wonder and Fantasy* (both pre-war and post-war versions) — and was a reader of *New Worlds* back in the late '60s and early

'70s. (Much of it struck me as very naive, but I admired the magazine's spirit. Stirring up dust in musty vaults is always fine by me, and certainly, say, *Analog* circa 1969 was no epitome of freshness and creativity.)

The immediate difference one notices is that old British SF magazines don't have naked ladies on them. You folks never had your equivalent of Margaret Brundage (who did *Weird Tales* covers in the



'30s) or Earle Bergey (*Thrilling Wonder Stories*, late '40s), and one result was that British SF was always a bit more respectable. But — correct me if I'm wrong on this — there has always been a subcellar of British publishing which is much scruffier than the American product. You see them in old bookstores: ghastly little paperbacks by writers no one has heard of in decades, the best remembered of whom are John Russell Fearn and lesser pseudonyms of E.C. Tubby; magazines that go downhill from *Vargo Statten Science Fiction Magazine*. I saw lots of them when I visited London's Fantasy Centre last

September.

The advantage *Interzone* and *New Worlds* have is that they're never confused with *Vargo Statten* or *Futuristic Science Stories*. You Brits have always enjoyed a clear and distinct chasm between the adult, more literary, SF and the juvenile pulp. In America, everything has always been mixed together. So we were reading pieces of *The Martian Chronicles* in pulp magazines with naked ladies on the covers, and I understand Arthur C. Clarke was none too pleased when *Startling Stories* gave *Against the Fall of Night* a sexy cover.

Again, correct me if I'm wrong, but it's my perception that there's a fundamental difference between British and American SF at this level, going as far back as the 1940s. The best British SF was never seen as pulp. The writers were allowed — even expected — to display a kind of artistic rigor and integrity that the Americans had to fight for, and which many American editors still don't understand.

It's something we Americans can envy. What we don't envy is (apparently) a much smaller market, lower advances, and a scene which for several years supported no professional magazine at all. So all of us have a ways to go yet. I notice that British publishing is just beginning to pick up some of the most pernicious American habits: share-cropping, collaboration-for-hire, obviously formulaic shared-universe anthologies. (Is it a coincidence that nobody seems to have put his real name on the "Warhammer" series?) And, while I suspect that a larger percentage of the British population is *literate*, fewer of them probably read SF. I was quite surprised, when I visited London last fall, to find large bookstores which

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Rating System

☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆	Very Good
☆☆	Good
☆	Fair
☆	Poor

had no science fiction section at all, a circumstance unheard of in the U.S. So here we are, with much in common, sharing aspirations, reading each other's magazines, separated by a common language, and I won't hold it against ya if you guys don't talk the president's American too good.

I want to start out talking about a couple of mainstream fantasy novels. Non-genre stuff, published as "regular" fiction. Prior to, at the very earliest, the sword-and-sorcery boom of the late '60s, all fantasy fell into this category. Now, much of the best does. "Mainstream" fantasy is more likely to be for adults, to be free of trilogy strictures, and to be more artistically ambitious and intellectually challenging than the latest Tolkien/Bradley/Norton clone.

So these books need to be monitored. It's something I try to do. Every once in a while you find a real gem this way.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories

By Salman Rushdie
Viking, 1990 219 pp., \$18.95

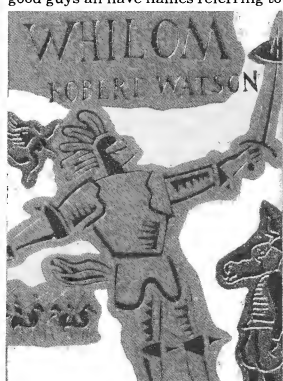
Of course it's impossible to read or review this without some awareness of the drama that's gone on in the author's life for the last couple of years. Rushdie has been under appreciable strain, living in hiding as a *de facto* prisoner, his marriage ruined, his son separated from him, all because of the ravings of wild-eyed fanatics who have not read his previous novel.

So, in some ways this is a very odd book for someone in such a position to have written; in others it is wholly to be expected. It's a cartoon dream of liberation, with hardly any textures of the real world in it. (*The Satanic Verses*, for all its fantasy, contains a great deal of real social observation.) I kept thinking of it in terms of the Beatles' movie *Yellow Submarine*: that kind of fantasy, which reminds you in every line that it is artificial, fanciful, made-up; quite unlike the usual fantasy novel, which is basically a realistic story with fantastic settings or plot elements. Once we're in Earthsea or wherever and the dragons and magic are in place, the typical fantasy tries to be plausible, both in terms of logic and of psychology.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories is about a boy whose storyteller father loses his gift. It seems that the water-

genie plumber is about to disconnect Dad's line to the Sea of Stories. Before long, everyone is off to the Earth's second moon, where the Sea of Stories is being destroyed by the evil ruler Khattam-Shud. But, with the aid of magical companions, the boy prevails and all ends happily.

One does indeed think of Pepperland and the Blue Meanies and the Sea of Holes. This is a story about storytelling. Most of the proper names are plays on Hindustani words (a lexicon of them is provided): the moon is called Kahani (Story); the evil ruler's name means "completely finished"; the bad guys, the Chupwalas, are "quiet" and they practice the religion of Bezaban, "without a tongue." The good guys all have names referring to



talk, gossip, books, pages, and so on. It thus becomes very possible to read the whole thing as an allegory for Rushdie's situation and a warning against the dangers of censorship.

It would make a good animated feature, incidentally. It is fast-moving, very visual, and full of the kind of crazy invention that such a film would need. But I doubt anyone will dare make it, for fear of the wrath of screaming hordes, who have (of course) not read *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and were be even more irate if they did and recognized themselves in it. Rushdie knows better than most of us that the world is indeed full of Chupwalas.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Whilom
By Robert Watson
Atlantic Monthly Press,
1990 216 pp., \$18.95

Even though we find gems lurking among non-generic fantasies, it doesn't necessarily mean that every such book by a writer we've never heard of is going to turn out to be *The Wandering Unicorn* either. *Whilom* disappointed me. For the longest time fantasy writers have been doing "what really happened" versions of famous stories. Evangeline Walton did a marvelous job with at least the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogion* (to be fair, I have only read *The Island of the Mighty*, not the other three in that set), and countless writers have done it with King Arthur.

Whilom (the title is Middle English — not Old English as the flap copy would have us believe — for "once upon a time") is the "what really happened" account of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with a large dollop of Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*. So we have a superficially realistic novel set in a fantastic, medieval/antique Athens, where Theseus is a feudal lord surrounded by chivalrous knights. The Fairy king Oberon forms a framing device. Much of the point of view is that of Nick Bottom, one of the Rude Mechanicals, but... I read chapter after chapter, and acknowledge that, yes, Watson knows his Shakespeare and his Chaucer, but why doesn't he do something with the material? We never get what the opening seems to promise, a new, skewed view of these events which will give them fresh meaning. We have only the familiar story, without the characters coming to life, without effective satire, without moving drama, or, frankly, any reason for reading this rather than Chaucer or Shakespeare, save that the language is easier for the lazy. But, no, it doesn't work, and the writing is hardly better than the average, pretty good genre fantasy. This is a book which promises to be something special and then isn't. Alas.

Rating: ☆☆☆

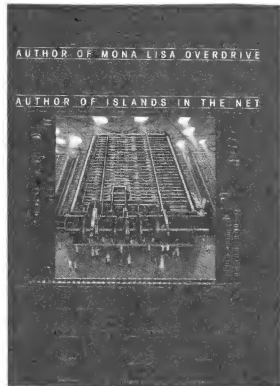
And now some regular SF:

The Difference Engine
By William Gibson
and Bruce Sterling
Bantam/Spectra, 1991
435 pp., \$19.95

My U.K. readers may be able to

explain parts of this one to me, since my own acquaintance with British society and speech patterns is entirely too superficial for me to be able to tell if Gibson and Sterling's Britishisms ring true.

The Difference Engine is the sort of alternate-history novel that would make my friend Lee Weinstein, who doesn't like alternate-history novels, say, "I told you so." His objection to the form is that once you've changed one aspect of the past, then the ramifications become entirely arbitrary (Napoleon wins at Waterloo; does he or does he not attack England, turn on Russia, go back to Egypt, settle down and invent stromboli shaped like his famous hat?) and the story has an uninvolved, made-up quality to it.



My reply is that in the classical alternate history, such as Keith Roberts' *Pavane*, you make *one* change, and then the differences between the imagined world and our own, however startling, are all the logical outgrowth of that one alteration.

In *The Difference Engine* Charles Babbage perfects a working computer in the second quarter of the 19th century, and then lots of other things are different, too. Keats doesn't die of consumption at 26. The United States breaks up into several nations well before the Civil War should have taken place. Steam technology goes off in a variety of directions, so that steam-driven road vehicles are common. (Recall that Roberts, too, had pavement-bound steam trains, but only because in his Catholic-dominated Britain, the internal combustion engine had been banned by a papal bull; everything went back to

the initial premise.) Lord Byron doesn't seem to have died in Greece, but instead went into politics, founded the Industrial Radical Party, and took over England. Sam Houston is shot in London in 1855. In fact, *quite a few* things seem to have changed, entirely independently.

It's a credit to Gibson and Sterling that they can draw interesting characters and keep an intriguing, fast-moving story going amid all this. Most readers will enjoy this book, but many will be left wondering if the two Wonder Kids of Cyber (now Steam) Punk didn't succumb to the temptation once too often to cram Just One More Neat Idea in, whether it belonged or not.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Some very special nonfiction:

The Harlan Ellison Hornbook

By Harlan Ellison

Penzler Books, 1990

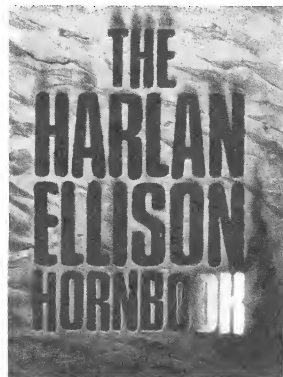
418 pp., \$22.95

Here's a time capsule from nearly twenty years ago, very deftly edited as such. The bulk of it consists of columns Harlan wrote for the *Los Angeles Free Press* in the early '70s. The book was announced as forthcoming from Mirage Press as far back as (if I recall correctly) 1970. As we now have it, the original columns are supplemented by introductions, notes, and additional articles (including a long one from a 1988 *Playboy* about the '60s and how they are remembered), giving an interesting double-sided view of Harlan then and now. He is not quite the same person who wrote this material. His voice, his outlook are not the same. Sometimes he seems slightly embarrassed by the shrillness of his former self.

Old-time fans may remember that in those days Ellison was a cult figure of major proportions. Harlan Ellison stories were a major currency of fan-nish conversation. When Harlan spoke at a convention, *everyone* came. I saw him do some pretty amazing things myself, like the time he tried to show a work-print of *A Boy and His Dog* at the 1974 Worldcon, and after some *hours* of technical difficulties one night, the film never got shown at all. But the crowd didn't go away angry. Harlan kept them entertained all that time. The following night, the same thousand or so people sat

through *another* hour or two of difficulties without complaint, and when forms were passed around afterwards, something like eight people rated the film less than excellent. I can't imagine anyone else who could have pulled that off. But Harlan could call his audience a bunch of assholes and get a standing ovation. I saw him do that once or twice, too.

On the darker side, he was everybody's favorite gladiator. One of the (figuratively) goriest scenes I ever witnessed was a panel on the New Wave (remember that?) featuring several other people, Harlan, and J.J. Pierce, who in those days had an anti-New Wave organization called the Second Foundation, which published



manifestoes and a propaganda magazine. (Which I admit I wrote for; pretty stupidly too.) Forget about the other panelists. The audience was after blood. They didn't care about the New Wave. They wanted to see Harlan skewer J.J. Pierce. I think part of the appeal of all this was that Harlan was doing things his audience wouldn't dare do, and they were getting vicarious, cheap thrills this way. (The idea seems to have occurred to him too. An Ellison story of this period concerned a celebrity sucked dry by his vampiric fans.)

Well, the *Hornbook* gives you the Ellison of that era, flaying, skewering, stomping on the sacred. He writes extremely well. He usually makes his case. He tells Harlan Ellison stories much better than the fans ever could. Topics range from treacherous girlfriends, to a career as a hired gun, to the death of a dog, to a visit to San

Quentin. And lots more. As he points out a few times, these pieces partake of the venerable tradition of confessional writing, which in American literature goes back at least as far as Mark Twain, whereby the writer takes the material of his own direct experiences, tells it truthfully, and makes the result both entertaining and meaningful in a larger context. And Ellison does. After all this time, the waiting was worth it.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

The Weird Tale

By S.T. Joshi

University of Texas Press, 1990

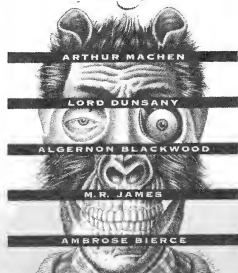
296 pp., \$27.50 (cloth),

\$12.95 (trade paper)

This is a brilliant book, one of the most genuinely *insightful* critical works to come along in quite some time. Joshi, a pioneering Lovecraft scholar, now extends his talents to Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, Ambrose Bierce, and M.R. James — and, yes, Lovecraft again. His main contribution to Lovecraft studies has been his explication of Lovecraft's *thought*, and the premise of this book

THE WEIRD TALE

by S.T. Joshi



is that the weird tale — well, horror if you like — is a real, artistic form like any other, and exists for more than saying "Boo!" It, like any other sort of Real Literature, is distinctly *about something* and gets interesting when the author uses it to express, uniquely, his individual outlook or philosophy.

Joshi has little patience with M.R. James, who betrays little thematic seriousness and *did* write for the

primary purpose of giving English schoolboys the shivers; but the others are, indeed, another matter. Machen and Blackwood were mystics. Dunsany was (apparently) a materialist with anti-modern leanings, reactionary in his politics, romantic in his literary theory. Bierce was in his own way a *realist* who wrote of the world as he saw it, and whose aesthetic called for absolute clarity of language. Lovecraft, of course, was the supreme mechanistic materialist, for whom *beauty* (in art, in nature, in tradition) was the sole purpose for existence in a meaningless universe. Each one of these writers has a distinct vision, which Joshi presents to us, even when he is willing to admit, in the cases of Machen and particularly Blackwood — and how many critics are so honest? — that he doesn't always understand it.

Each one of these essays is groundbreaking. As the author of the world's leading full-length critical study of Dunsany (i.e. the only one), I readily see that if Joshi expanded his chapter on Dunsany into a book, I'd be in second place.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆



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Greetings



Harlan Ellison is the author of "Darkness Upon the Face of the Deep," the story of a horror that would thrill H.P. Lovecraft. That's Ellison with his wife, Susan, who writes our "Through



Paul Chadwick

the Lens" column.

Ellison has instructed me to write that "he chooses not to say anything new about himself. Let the story speak for itself." At his insistence, I will have to skip any men-

tion of his recent work or past accomplishments.

Ellison did say he was looking forward to seeing the art work for "Darkness" which is by Paul Chadwick and graces



Frederik Pohl

our cover this issue.

Born and raised in Bellevue, Washington, Paul Chadwick received his art training at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. His

science fiction paintings have appeared on the covers of DAW, Baen and Del Rey books, and of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. He has also worked as a film designer and storyboard artist, and is



Robert Pasternak

best known for his comic book series, *Concrete*.

Frederick Pohl has written "The Matter of Beupre," about a U.S. Supreme Court that makes one decision too many. Fans of the always genteel and obliging Pohl are in luck. The Hugo- and Nebula-award-winning author and editor has several new books coming out this year.

When I spoke to him he was finishing up a collaboration with Isaac Asimov on a non-fiction book titled *How to Save the Earth the Hard Way*.

He's written another novel with Jack Williamson called *The Singers of Time* to be published this spring by Bantam/Spectra. Pohl says it was inspired by the ideas in Stephen Hawking's *Brief History of Time*.

And Pohl's novella *Outnumbering the Dead* is being published by Arrow Books. When I spoke to him Pohl had just returned from the Seychelles islands. They are lovely, he says, but it's a very long trip.

"The Matter of Beupre" is illustrated by Robert Pasternak. He tells me he's been preparing for some art shows and working on a new issue of his *Acid Man Society* mini-comic published by Comix Wave.

Pasternak says *Acid Man* is a future evolutionary form of human: soulless, mummy-like and suffering from chemicalization. He got the idea for the body form by sketching his shadow while riding a bus.

Pasternak marvels at the growth of his baby daughter, Zorya, who is "excited



Harlan and Susan Ellison



Gary W. Mitchell

about everything" and has taken to exclaiming "Oh wow!"

In "Like a Flithiss from its Shell" by Gary W. Mitchell and M. Alan Clarkson, a human in an alien world is too clever for his own good.

This is Mitchell and Clarkson's first short story sale. The authors are both thirty-ish, married, read tons of SF and live in



M. Alan Clarkson

Kansas. Mitchell works for an aircraft company and loves astronomy. Clarkson stays at home with his two-year-old daughter, writes, and loves barbecue potato chips.

"Like a Flithiss" is illustrated by **Larry Blamire**. The Boston artist has been stretching those multi-talented wings of his. He had a role in the Fox television drama *Against the Law* and he's been writ-



Larry Blamire

ing a murder mystery spoof for *Baker's Plays*.

"The Cry of a Seagull" by Lois Tilton shows what today's injustice could mean for the next generation. Tilton's past work in *Aboriginal* includes "To Dust" (Nov.-Dec. 1989) and "Life Support" (Nov.-Dec. 1990). She says she's working on a fantasy about the Norse Gods. She recently sold two stories to *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazine and horror stories to the anthologies *Borderlands II* and *Dead End City Limits*.

Tilton says she's on the programming



Lois Tilton

committee for the next WorldCon, which will be held in Chicago. When I spoke to her she was just getting over the shock of buying her daughter \$150 rollerblades for Christmas.

"The Cry of the Seagull" is illustrated by **Carol Heyer**, who is having marvelous success as a children's book writer/illustrator. *The Easter Story* got picked up by Waldenbooks again this year after selling out last year. Heyer's working on two more children's books, laying out the story boards and going back and forth with a book designer.

She's also done some game work for TSR and others, including a game box, book interiors and a full-sized poster for "Castles" in the Dungeons and Dragons repertoire and a book of characters for Steve Jackson games.

Wil McCarthy has written "*Amerikano Hiaika*," the story of a cop who won't let death stop him from hunting



Carol Heyer



Wil McCarthy

down his wife's murderer.

McCarthy is also the author of "What I did with the OTV Grissom" (May-June 1990). He says while riding a bus in Tokyo he was so bombarded by images, he knew he had to write about it, hence the story whose title means "The American Blues." He's working on a novel titled *Optimal*



David Cherry

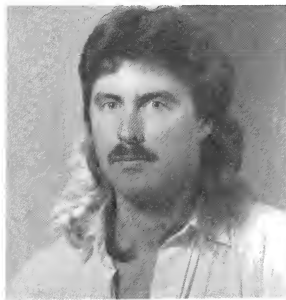
Jane and the Boiling Sea, about a trillionaire daredevil and her physics professor husband. He's also spending his spare time teaching creative writing and he's taken up scuba diving.

"*Amerikano Hiaika*" is illustrated by **David Cherry**, making his second appearance in *Aboriginal*. Cherry is a former attorney and the younger brother of author



Lawrence Watt-Evans

C.J. Cherryh. He grew up in Oklahoma where, by gosh, pupils would sing the famous Rodgers and Hammerstein tune every morning before class.



Bob Eggleton

Cherry got hooked on SF and fantasy painting after he wandered into his first convention art show and saw some of the classical myths he loved realistically depicted. He now splits his time between book cover assignments, fine art paintings and being president of the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists.

"Smart" weapons don't come as a surprise to SF writers. In "Targets" by Lawrence Watt-Evans, a world-weary soldier and a tank share a desert wasteland.

Watt-Evans is the author of the novels *The Lure of the Basilisk* and *Nightside City*. His short story "One-Shot" was just published in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and his new novel *The Blood of the Dragon* (Del Rey) is due out this year.

Watt-Evans says his wife, Julie Evans, an IBM engineer, supported him while he wrote his first novel. He loves comic books and nickel-dime poker.

"Targets" is illustrated by Bob Eggleton. As I mentioned in our last issue, Eggleton is one busy cover artist. He's illustrating covers for books by William Shatner, James Michener, and Greg Bear. He'll be doing the cover for a collection of Catholic SF stories called *The Sacred Vision* edited by Andrew Greeley. And you can catch more of his work on some upcoming covers of *Amazing Stories*, *Isaac Asimov's* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction* magazines.

The poem *Reason is a Reptile* is by William John Watkins, a resident of Ocean, New Jersey, who claims to be 47-years-old "this incarnation".

He recently published *The Last Deathship off Antares* (Warner books, 1989), and is working on *Raised Among Wolves*, a "mainstream novel most unlikely to get to your local bookstore". He teaches early American literature at Brookdale Community College.

Warner Questar Editor Brian

Thomsen, speaking as a guest of honor at Boskone XXVIII in Springfield, Mass., expressed concern that the field of SF may be "losing our roots."



William John Watkins

He cited numerous SF classics that are no longer in print and are not available for today's new readers to enjoy. Thomsen noted the increasingly short "shelf life" of new books and wondered if names like Robert A. Heinlein and Clifford D. Simak may soon become lost to the readers of the next decade.

Thomsen cited Jim Frankel's efforts at Collier's, where he is reprinting a number of classics, and the efforts of Bridge Publications, which is re-issuing the works of the late L. Ron Hubbard.

Bridge recently re-released a new edition of Hubbard's *Fear* at a party in its garage in downtown Los Angeles. The garage was cleverly disguised so as to resemble a 1930s nightclub.

A number of guests were invited to be on hand for the release of *Fear*, by Fred Harris, of Author Services, including *Aboriginal's* Editor Charles C. Ryan, and Advertising Director Mary C. Ryan. □

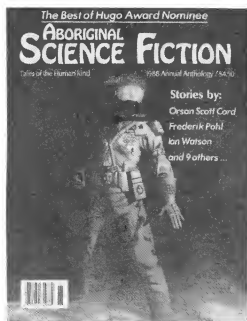
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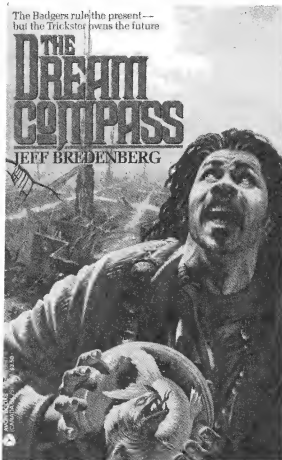
Charles & Mary Ryan with Fred Harris

Breaking Old Ground

The Dream Compass

By Jeff Breidenberg
Avon, 1991
180 pp., \$3.50

The post-holocaust novel is one of the most tired sub-genres in science



fiction, yet its appeal is undeniable, and it continues to be written, despite changes in the world situation. Jeff Breidenberg tries to bring something new to the form, by mixing a familiar rebuilding society with a very unfamiliar type of mystic fantasy.

The Dream Compass is set several

centuries after the nuclear war that destroyed civilization, in the country named Merqua. Merqua is ruled by a repressive government which, disturbingly, maintains the rhetoric of democracy. The story begins with Anton Takk escaping a logging camp cum prison in northern Ontario in search of his betrothed, the convicted murderer Nora Londi. The seemingly simple escape has repercussions beyond what one might expect, involving an underground opposition movement, the government, and, most mysteriously, Pec-Pec, the Trickster, magician and, perhaps, god.

Breidenberg has created a peculiar world of melting concrete and mish-mash technology, of cities and cannibals, of re-invented machines and magic fish. The world we tour is fascinating, and so is the plot, with its twisted logic and hidden motives, all coming to a climax in a final confrontation with the head of the government. That climax, unfortunately, is a let-down. The confrontation, and the disaster narrowly averted, are conventional and do not fit in well with this highly unconventional book.

The characters are vivid and, generally, credible. The one exception is one of the villains of the book, Mick Kerbaugh, a government agent, who lacks a single redeeming quality. Some of the settings and characters introduced near the end may also strain readers' suspension of disbelief if they have not fully yielded to the book's manic weirdness.

Though *The Dream Compass* is the first of a series, it stands alone. If Breidenberg can get the weirdness under control and avoid further falls into the conventional, the series will be a notable contribution to the field.

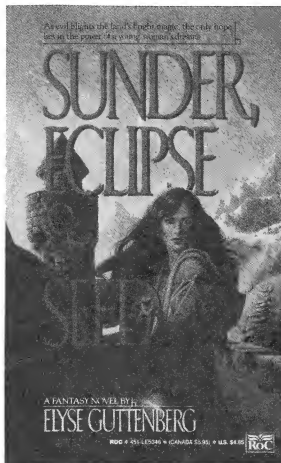
Rating: ☆☆☆1/2



Sunder, Eclipse & Seed

By Elyse Guttenberg
Roc, 1990
351 pp., \$4.95

At the outset, this book did not ap-



pear promising to me. The front cover blurb — "As evil blights the land's bright magic, the only hope lies in the power of a young woman's dreams" — made it sound like 37 million other fantasy novels published each year. However, Elyse Guttenberg has written a brilliant and original fantasy, touched with poetry and myth.

Calyx is the younger, misfit daughter of the lord of Briana. Rumored to be a bastard, she is plain and clumsy and can never please her father. She treasures one secret, however; like the Sumedaro priests in their temples, she has true dreams, dreams of what is and what is to come.

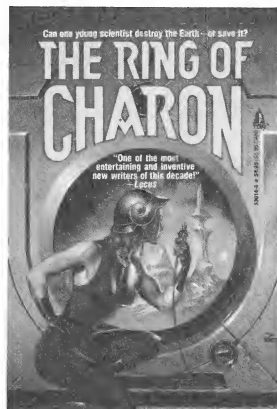
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Rating System

- ☆☆☆☆☆ Outstanding
- ☆☆☆☆ Very Good
- ☆☆☆ Good
- ☆☆ Fair
- ☆ Poor

After a final offense to her father, she is banished to the temple at Aster, but the priests will not allow her to train to join them. As Calyx struggles to learn despite them, she must also fight Edishu, the evil creation of the gods' dreams, who wishes to use her to finish his conquest of the world.

The essential strength of *Sunder, Eclipse & Seed* is the mythology upon which it is based. Guttenberg has created a mythos that seems entirely original, not cribbed from past or ex-



isting cultures. That mythology — which is, in fact, reality in the world of this novel — is rich, vital, and believable, and the plot grows out of it smoothly and naturally.

Calyx is a strong, many-faceted, and sympathetic protagonist, someone you'd like to know. The other characters are also good, as Guttenberg avoids the pitfalls of one-dimensionality. Even the villains of the book are revealed as well-rounded human beings. None of the action of the book rings false.

Sunder, Eclipse & Seed is (groan) the first of a trilogy, so it does not all tie up at the end, though many of the plot threads are resolved. I strongly recommend you seek it out, and I'll certainly be looking forward to the subsequent volumes.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

The Ring of Charon

By Roger MacBride Allen
Tor, 1990
500 pp., \$4.95

Anyone who complains that we don't see galaxy-spanning, cosmic hard SF

these days hasn't read Roger MacBride Allen's new book, *The Ring of Charon*, which starts with the theft of the Earth and moves on from there. Allen's novel is a near-perfect exemplar of the sub-genre, managing to combine suspense, a solidly-constructed plot, super-science, truly alien aliens, and believable characters. Though the first of what promises to be a fascinating series, *The Ring of Charon*, as the author promises in his Acknowledgments, stands alone.

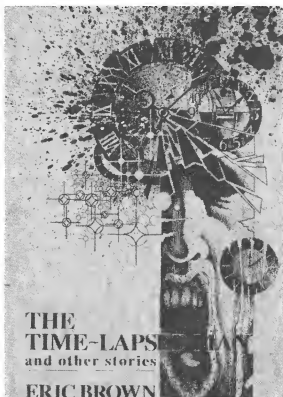
Larry O'Shawnessy Chao is a young physicist stationed on Pluto, working with the huge gravity research ring that surrounds the moon Charon. The station is about to be shut down due to straitened economic times on Earth, and nobody is interested in Larry's revolutionary new findings. Sneaking in an experiment to prove his theories right, he is flabbergasted when his harmless gravity-wave beam appears to destroy the Earth. We soon learn, however, that the beam was intercepted by an alien device, hidden in the moon, which took it as a signal to steal away the Earth. During the rest of the book, we follow those left in the Solar System as well as those transported with the Earth, as they seek to find out just what has happened and why. The answers are chilling.

Allen has created a rich human civilization, the most intriguing component of which is the Naked Purple Movement, also known as the Pointless Cause, a deliberately incomprehensible radical movement that ends up playing a pivotal role in the attempt by those left behind to communicate with the stolen Earth. The aliens, dubbed Charonians, are original, believable, and most definitely alien; there's nothing friendly or comfortable about them, and their motives are not human.

The physics of gravity on which much of the book's action relies seemed highly plausible to me, though I'm no physicist. There are a few hard lumps of exposition early in the book, but for the most part Allen avoids that standard trap for the hard SF writer — no circuit diagrams here. Many of the details are explained in the glossary and appendices for those who wish to know more, but I recommend not reading them until after finishing the book, for they do give away some plot developments.

The characters are varied and credible, everyone from a born-again scientist to Ohio Template Windbag, leader of the Naked Purple Habitat. (Don't be fooled by the spandex-garbed Boris bimbo on the front cover; she wandered over from another novel.) The plot is suspenseful enough that you'll want to read this very long book in one sitting. The writing is smooth and the style unobtrusive. *The Ring of Charon*, in short, is not to be missed.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆ 1/2



The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories

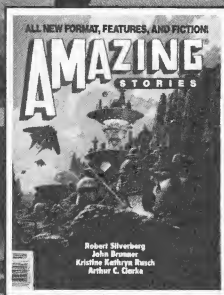
By Eric Brown
Drunken Dragon Press, 1990
216 pp., £13.50 standard,
£35.00 deluxe edition

Eric Brown's stories will be familiar to readers of *Interzone*, but they do not seem to have appeared yet in America (apart from that magazine's small American distribution). I found myself alternately intrigued and puzzled by the stories collected in *The Time-Lapsed Man*. Though they have a very modern surface appearance, with sex and drugs playing prominent roles, a distinct aroma of pulp paper is detectable. These are essentially old-fashioned, Golden Age SF stories in 1990s garb.

I don't mean to imply that the stories lack originality, for they do not. The climactic revelation in "Star-Crystals and Karmel," for example, shocked me and haunts me still. However, the basic plots would not have been out of place in John Campbell's *Astounding*.

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"The Time-Lapsed Man" presents us with Thorn, a star-traveling Engineman, whose senses gradually become delayed until he perceives nothing until a day or more after it happens. In "Big Trouble Upstairs," a crazed killer is loose on the Disney-run Carnival Satellite. "Pithecanthropus Blues" features a former Engineman who is mentally exchanging places with a caveman ancestor. "The Inheritors of Earth" partakes of an even older tradition; it is a Wellsian pastiche.

The future world these stories are set in, of course, would never have

made it onto the page in the '40s. It is a world where children ten and younger engage in adult sexual activity, where drugs are commonplace and even necessary, where truly good people run the risk of being kidnapped and killed to make entertainment tapes. Yet sometimes it seems Brown is trying too hard; a title like "Krash-Bangg Joe and the Pineal-Zen Equation" comes off as silly, rather than punk, and doesn't do justice to the story it heads.

It is character that works best in these stories, and the best of them are those that center more on people than

on setting. "Star Crystals and Karmel," "Krash-Bangg Joe ...," and "The Girl Who Died for Art and Lived" are moving and memorable, and the ending of "The Karma Kid Transcends" carries a kick.

Brown is certainly an author to watch, and this collection is worth reading. It remains to be seen whether he can strip away the non-essential, and sometimes strained, decor and find a true blending of old and new-fashioned science fiction.

Rating: ☆☆☆ 1/2



Seagull

(Continued from page 5)

pointed chin. There she stood, waiting for his answer, her eyes still lowered modestly to the deck.

What did *she* want? he wondered, and suddenly he felt ashamed of his rudeness. Was it possible that she really did care for him? It was the cigarettes, he told himself. He hadn't had a smoke in over a week.

He took a breath and said, "I would be honored."

As relief lit up her narrow features, he made an effort to imagine himself in bed with her, to see her bearing his sons. His sons, born on this ship, stateless refugees ...

Suddenly Ling lifted her head, exclaiming, "Look! Do you see the gulls? My grandmother used to tell me each one is really the soul of a sailor lost at sea, watching for lost ships to guide them into port."

Chen glanced up at the birds soaring above the ship and thought they were more likely watching for garbage thrown overboard. But he left the words unsaid, not to hurt her unnecessarily.

Seoul, Taipei. Now past the Formosa Strait, heading for Manila. Port after port, all teeming with humanity to the point where the surplus population spilled out into the harbors, born there and dying.

"My grandfather was born on a junk on the Pearl River, you know."

Chen recognized the opening of one of Grandmother's stories. His great-great-grandfather, that would have been, he thought.

Lao Song spoke as she ate, very slowly, her trembling hands conveying one or two grains at a time to her mouth while Chen knelt in front of her bunk holding the rice bowl. Below was the mat where he slept. Since Grandmother found it hard to climb the stairs these days, he usually brought her food from the ship's galley to their quarters — he or Liang Ling did. Tonight it was rice with a few scraps of fish, plain and unseasoned. Rice, kelp, and fish were their meager staples. They trawled for what they could catch with the ship's ancient nets, though lately the fishing had been poor.

But Lao Song had lived through the days of real hardship, "when the Japanese came," and people starved.

Of three girls in her family, she had been the only one to survive the war. Now she ate with slow, toothless deliberation, chopsticks chinking against the rim of her bowl as she picked up every broken grain.

Chen finished his own meal in a few hurried bites. Everything he ate tasted like machine oil, anyway.

"Grandson? Is something wrong?"

"I'm sorry, Grandmother. I wasn't listening. No, nothing's wrong. It's just that the engine needs repairs, that's all."

She nodded. "You work hard. It will be good for you to have a wife to help out. I only hope I live to see my first great-grandson." Then she smiled as a recollection hit her. "You know, my mother-in-law looked down on my family because we had come to Hong Kong as refugees during the war. No matter how successful my father's business was, nothing I did was ever good enough for her. The old dragon!"

Chen sat silently, half-listening to a story he had heard since his childhood. If he married Liang Ling, his own sons would be born on the *Golden Crane*. From a junk on the Pearl River to a rusting freighter with no port to call home. Not much progress in five generations. He had sworn not to let it happen. Others had escaped, he could too. But not if he were tied down. Remember Wang Dabao, remember Vancouver.

"Grandmother," he asked suddenly, "did you ever regret leaving? Would it really have been so bad under the Communists?"

"Ah!" she said. "Nothing could be worse than when the Japanese came! But once we got to Hong Kong, things went well. You'll see, it'll be all right in the end. Especially now that you're getting married."

He set his bowl down so hard it almost cracked. But she stopped him as he stood up, protesting querulously, "Where are you going?"

"I have work."

"Wait," she said unexpectedly. "Take me up on deck. I want to see my home!"

"But, Grandmother, we're nowhere close enough to see Hong Kong!" He was sorry now that he'd mentioned the subject, but she insisted, so he took her arm and helped her up. It was slow progress up the stairs. Even with his support, Lao Song's arthritis made her hobble the way the old ladies must have done on their bound feet when she was a girl, and once up on deck the sunlight revealed the

shabby, rust-colored condition of her worn black silk dress.

But at first the fresh air seemed to reanimate her. She held onto the rail, gazing toward the horizon at the dim, distant land mass that was China. He stood next to her, pensive and depressed. None of them could go home now even if they wanted to, not unless Peking retracted its current campaign: *Turn Away the Defectors*. It hadn't been his fault, he felt like protesting, if the vast, impersonal land would only listen. He had only been six years old!

"I want to go back," his grandmother suddenly said. There was a quaver in her voice.

Chen looked up. "What?"

"Take me back down!"

He didn't understand at first what was agitating her so, until he noticed the distant form of a gunboat emerging from behind the island he had taken for part of the mainland. A Chinese patrol boat, he thought for a moment, warning us off. But then, as the wind shifted slightly, he caught the scent of the island's fetid breath, the stench of human filth and disease. He drew back with a shudder. Now he knew where they were — just off the notorious Ping Chau Island refugee camp. The island had been a death camp for decades, beginning with the Vietnamese.

He stared at his grandmother — how had she known? She was clutching his arm, and then his shadow Liang Ling was suddenly and silently there, taking her from him. The old woman held on gratefully to the younger one, leaned on her with tears sliding down the network of wrinkles on her face.

Chen turned away abruptly. "Please take her back down," he told Ling. "I've got work to do." He was suddenly worried about a connecting rod on the port engine that had been giving them trouble for the last few days. They couldn't have it breaking down, not here, so close to this place.

Lao Song died two nights later, half-way between Taipei and Manila. She would be buried in the middle of the South China Sea, although it would hardly be a burial, throwing her body over the side for the sharks, Chen thought bitterly. He had a vague sense that it must in some way be his fault, that as her only surviving descendant it was all his responsibility.

But the ship's old women took immediate charge of the body, laying Lao Song out for her funeral. It was a terrible thing, they wailed, to die and be buried at sea, where no one would ever place offerings at her grave. They had grown old on the ship, and they feared above all else that they were going to die here and be buried as they were preparing to bury Lao Song.

"Do everything properly," he told them, even though he knew the heat and the conditions on board made it necessary to hold the ceremony as quickly as possible. But the old women, thinking no doubt of their own funerals to come, spared no effort to make as grand a display as possible. Chen, to pay for the feast and the offerings, disposed of his father's antique Rolex. He felt no regret as he traded the watch for one of the Hsu family's treasured chickens. What use was such a thing to him here on the ship? What good had it ever done Chen Wei?

Ling was at the funeral dressed all in white mourning,

as if she had already been Lao Song's granddaughter-in-law. Chen made no protest, knowing what his grandmother had wanted. He even endured the rest of the Liang clan intruding themselves like they were family. At a time like this, family was the most important thing, after all.

Lao Ma, the ship's soothsayer-astrologer-priest, the only one who still knew the proper prayers, recited them over the body, his dry old voice breaking whenever his memory slipped. Then two of the Liang brothers helped Chen lift the white-shrouded body up over the rail.

But there isn't even a coffin! he wanted to cry as the bundle fell with a splash into the sea. They had no wood to spare for such things aboard the ship, not at any price. It was the same at all the funerals; it had been the same six years ago, when they buried his father.

Overhead, a gull cried. Chen's head jerked up and saw a flash of white as the sunlight caught its wings. From beside him came Ling's reverent intake of breath. "Look! Her soul!" she whispered.

He went still, staring at the bird. How could she believe in such things? All of them, wearing their mourning so blindly, hoping so blindly! He turned around, seeing the funeral trappings, the useless paper offerings. And enshrined like the image of a goddess was Lao Song's passport, the most useless object of them all. It had been a lie, all along. Life and death, that was all there was. Life and death and the ship. Twenty years of a lie, steaming aimlessly from one port to the next, waiting for the someday when Canada would relent, or Singapore, or Taiwan. But it would never come. His sons — he glanced briefly at Liang Ling — if he had sons, would be born here on this ship. They would all be buried here, thrown over the side for the sharks.

His grief boiled over. He couldn't stop himself. Breaking through the crowd of onlookers, he ran down the stairs to his quarters, strangely empty now without Grandmother on her bunk. But the lacquer box was still there, with his own passport, unused, useless!

Running back up on deck, he pushed his way back to the rail through shrill voices demanding what he was doing, didn't he have any respect? Ignoring them, he flung the passport out over the rail. It fell like a broken-winged bird to the waves where the ship's wake washed over it, and it was gone.

The Golden Crane had been stopped outside Darwin's harbor by Australian officials citing unsanitary conditions onboard. A Commonwealth port, Chen thought bitterly to himself, but Australia's vast empty interior had been closed for decades to Asian immigrants, and the refugee tide following the takeover of Hong Kong had only made things worse.

This time, after desperate negotiations and the urgent intervention of the importer whose cargo was stowed in their holds, the freighter finally received permission to dock and offload, besides the opportunity to refuel and buy supplies, but no time to take on outbound cargo.

His fault, the whispers hissed, pointing at Chen. His defiant gesture at the funeral had offended everyone. He had brought down bad luck on the whole ship.

"You behaved very rudely," Ling had told him. "Don't you have any respect? Were you drunk, was that it? I was so ashamed!"

She was already nagging him, just like a wife. It would have been disrespectful to have the wedding so soon after Lao Song's funeral, but he was determined now, despite everything, to have her. It had been his grandmother's wish. She would bear his sons.

In the engine room, Yang added his own reproaches. "You behave badly, you disgrace yourself and everyone connected with you. Who will believe us, now, when we tell them the boilers have to be replaced?"

The engines had broken down three times on the way from Singapore to Darwin, causing the bridge committee to realize at last that their condition was terminal. Chen threw an oil-soaked rag down on the engine room floor. "What are they waiting for? Do they think we can do miracles down here?"

Yang sighed. It alarmed Chen to see how the senior engineer was growing old. How soon until the next funeral? And who would take over? Did he know enough about the engines yet?

"Fuel comes first," Yang said. "The tanks were almost empty. Maybe when we get to Jakarta, or better yet, Singapore. Though with no outbound cargo, the gods only know where the money will come from."

"Don't tell me there's no money!" Chen said heatedly, thinking of gold watches and other treasures hoarded against the day when they might be used to bribe some immigration official. "I'll bet if we searched the ship, we'd find enough!"

But Yang shook his head. If people had a little gold saved for an emergency, well, that was their business, wasn't it?

No, it wasn't. Chen wanted to argue, not if it left the whole ship at risk. But he kept his mouth shut and went grimly back to work. They still had to make port.

Yang watched him thoughtfully. "You've changed since your grandmother died. Maybe it is a good thing to be angry, after all. A man has to consider his responsibilities when he decides to get married. He has to look out for the future."

They managed to take on cargo in Jakarta, and the day after they left port, Chen went up to the Liang family quarters and announced that it was time he and Ling were married. The parents looked at each other, then both of them shrugged their consent. It had already been settled, after all.

There was no wedding feast. Once the brief ceremony was over, they carried Ling's few belongings to Chen's quarters and put them away in the box that had been Lao Song's.

When it came to the act itself, neither of them was quite ready. Ling took off her clothes very slowly, with her back turned to the bed where he was waiting. Her shivering nakedness, in spite of the heat, touched him. She was so small. Her breasts were like little hard plums; they would not fill his hand.

But the thing had to be done, and Chen deliberately pulled his wife down to the bed. His wife. The word brought a thickness into his throat and stirred his groin. He made the entrance into her body and planted his seed there. Afterward, there was a stain of blood on the sheet. It was good. It had been very good, he thought, until a glance at her face dampened his satisfaction. There were tears. For a moment he was unsure what to do, but then

he put a hand on her face and turned it to him.

"We'll have sons," he said firmly, and after a moment she nodded. It was the most important thing. It would be enough.

Then Chen settled to sleep beside her, refusing to remember how he had once planned for the day when Lao Song was gone and he would be free, some night in Vancouver harbor. He had been foolish then, and irresponsible, investing all his faith in a false hope. This was his future now. They would reach Singapore in less than a week, and this time the committee would have to find a way to refit the engines, at least.

In the middle of the Strait of Malacca, decades of corrosion finally claimed the starboard boiler. At first people thought nothing of the delay. They were used to breakdowns by now. As soon as the problem was fixed, they would be underway again.

But after a day passed, then another, while the ship rolled in the steaming equatorial heat, complaints began to be heard. Members of the bridge committee started to appear more frequently in the doorway to the engine room, where the sweating mechanics were laboring. How much longer?

With an effort, Chen restrained himself from throwing a wrench at the committee chairman's head. "Can't you see? The whole boiler is rusted through! The valves are corroded! It should have been replaced years ago! We kept telling you, but it was always wait till the next port, or there wasn't enough money! Now it's too late! You wanted to save your gold, now see how much good it does you!"

"You shut up!" the chairman screamed at him, but the other elders pulled him back, and then they all had a lengthy consultation with Engineer Yang. But Yang had nothing more to add. The boiler was probably beyond repair. Their only hope was to be towed into Singapore for a complete refit. If, of course, they could pay for it. Otherwise ...

In the West, there were the camps. Once inside, there was no escape, no hope. But here in the South China Sea, the attitude of the governments was less humane. Only a fortunate few ever made it as far as a refugee camp. In the Strait of Malacca, the sharks were fat.

After the committee had gone, Yang, Chen and the rest of the mechanics kept on working, determined despite everything they had said to try to get the engine running again, to get them at least as far as Singapore. As to what would happen then ...

"They'll find the money. You'll see," Yang predicted confidently.

Chen wiped his face without comment. He had scant faith in the elders. Oh, they had the gold all right, but what if they used it instead to try to bribe their way ashore in Singapore, abandoning the rest? As for himself, he had nothing left since the funeral, no choice, only the ship.

In the silenced engine room, the impact of bullets against the metal hull was deafening. His ears ringing, Chen heard the sound of running feet on the gangways and someone shouting, "Don't move, or you're all dead!"

The men who rushed into the engine room were dark-skinned, elaborately and fiercely tattooed. *Pirates!* Chen saw instantly, and all of them waving automatic weapons. One screamed in broken Cantonese, "On deck! Everybody — on deck. Hurry quick! Move, now! Up on deck!"

Numb with shock, Chen started to obey, but he was too slow. A broken-toothed pirate smashed his elbow with the stock of his weapon, yelling, "Drop it!" A wrench fell to the floor. Chen hadn't even known he was still being holding it. Clutching his throbbing arm, he was driven up the stairs, sick with terror. What was going to happen to them? Who was screaming on the upper deck?

For centuries, pirates had been as common in these waters as sharks, but the *Golden Crane* had always ignored the risk. Surely they wouldn't attack a full-sized ship? No, Chen thought bitterly. Not unless it was drifting, helpless, crippled with engine failure.

They emerged onto the upper deck into a scene of insane violence. An old man was on his knees by the stairs, wailing, a hand covering the bloody wreck of his face. Lao Ma, Chen recognized him, appalled. His gold teeth. They had battered them out of his mouth.

The pirates were gathering the people up here while they ransacked the rest of the ship. Women clutched their children to keep them still, screaming when they were torn away, when their own clothes were ripped off and searched, hands brutally invading the innermost parts of their bodies.

They'll rape the women later, Chen realized with growing horror. Rape them and maybe carry the young and pretty ones away with them. He thought of his wife and their unborn son. Ling wasn't pretty. He seized on that hope, praying desperately that they wouldn't touch her. Or, at least, when they were finished, that they might leave her behind, alive.

Hands flung him back against a bulkhead, and there was blinding pain as a gun butt struck him in the face. "Nothing! I have nothing!" he cried desperately, but they hit him again, again.

Perhaps his filthy mechanic's clothes finally convinced them. He was lying next to the bulkhead, groggy, hurting and afraid to move, when a scream sounded, a cry of raw physical agony that silenced the rest of the ship.

A pirate laughed. "Now, you tell us!"

A voice sobbed in denial, then rose again, that same animal sound, while the reek of singed flesh filled the air. Sickened, Chen crawled forward until he could see.

The pirates had a man spreadeagled on the deck — it was Wong Linfu, an elder on the committee, one Chen had suspected of hoarding gold. They were standing over him with a welding torch taken from the engine room, holding him down, and as Chen watched, horrified, the hissing blue flame was held on the sole of Wong's foot. The tortured man howled and writhed while his flesh seared, turned black. The odor threatened to make Chen's stomach heave.

The pirates laughed again. *Please*, Chen prayed, despising himself for his cowardice, *not me*. They wouldn't believe him, that he had no gold. They might not even care whether he was telling the truth or not. Their laughter made him shudder. They were enjoying this!

Slowly, he managed to worm himself backward, beneath a torn-down canvas canopy. He hid there while the torture went on, the pirates turning to more extreme measures to extort the ship's hidden gold. Infants were skewered and thrown over the side, women were raped and mutilated, men castrated in an orgy of terror and bloodshed. By the time they tore the canvas away from Chen's hiding place, the pirates were too sated to do much

more than batter him senseless.

He regained consciousness to a smell of smoke in the air. Oil and hot metal, not the flesh-smell. The ship. The ship was on fire.

The screaming had stopped. The pirates were gone. Have to put out the fire, he thought groggily. Put out the fire, get the engines working again. As far as Singapore. Their only hope. His sons ...

In a sudden panic, he realized he hadn't seen Ling up on deck during the ordeal. Ling ...

He staggered to his feet, stumbled across the deck, past people crawling, moaning, bleeding. To the stairwell. The smoke was thicker belowdecks. Coughing, he groped his way down the corridors, past the makeshift partitions that divided the space, and flung open the door to his own quarters.

She was there, sprawled up against the bulkhead, naked. Her abdomen gaped, opened from the crotch to just below her small breasts, viscera tumbled out onto her thighs. He wondered if they had known she was pregnant, if that was the reason, if they had even needed a reason.

Tears stinging his eyes, he turned away, back into the smoke-filled corridor, and blindly made his way back up on deck, to the rail. From across the strait a boat was churning up a wake as it closed the distance to the stricken ship. He watched its approach bleakly. A Malaysian patrol boat, another pirate — what difference did it make?

The seagulls. They circled above the ship, crying to him. So many souls.

The harbor was so far away. He could barely see the lights. The water was surprisingly cold, and the salt stung the raw places where he hurt. A wave closed over his head. There was a swift gray shape rushing toward him, a fin cutting through the water.

The lights in the harbor. So very far to go.

Our Next Issue

One if by land. Two if by sea ...

There are two lanterns in the church steeple! The British are coming! The British are coming! And we ain't kidding. The next issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* will actually contain the June issue of *Interzone*, Britain's largest science fiction magazine.

Interzone's Editor David Pringle has sent us the following for his June (Our July-August) issue:

"The Infinite Assassin" by Greg Egan, "Gene Wars" by Paul J. McAuley, "Hamelin, Nebraska" by Garry Kilworth, "The Nilakantha Scream" by Eric Brown, "Song of Bullfrogs, Cry of Geese" by Nicola Griffith, and "Ten Days That Shook the World" by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne ... and those ten days might just jiggle your conceptions about American history, as well. The really curious thing about this particular "what might have happened if ..." is that there is some historical basis for the authors' juggling of history. Fortunately, history did take a different path.

Also on hand will be Bruce Sterling's latest views on Cyberpunk, John Clute and Paul McAuley on books, an interview of David Wingrove by Stan Nichols and more Metaphorical fish & chips for everyone

Factoids



For those of you who may be keeping track, this is my twelfth column — that makes two years' worth. Before I started doing this, I would do a lot of science reading in areas outside of my field of solid-state physics and electronics, but nothing like I do now. I'm continually on the lookout for column ideas. For every column that you've seen, whether it was about creatures evolving in your refrigerator and eating radioactive potato salad, quantum dots, nonlinear reality, or building your own space aliens with toothpicks and marshmallows, I have rejected dozens, and at times what seems like hundreds, of possible column ideas. I read and read and then read some more, looking for just the right thing — that mix of science at the cutting edge that can be explained within a couple of pages, with something that is both informative enough to perhaps teach you something new and interesting enough that you won't fall asleep, or instantly flip to the book reviews.

I reject an awful lot of stuff — stuff that continues to lurk in my brain, stuff that I can't quite rid myself of. These past two years have seen me inundated with snippets of scientific facts — factoids. I'm close to the bursting point. I fear that, unless I purge myself, the next issue of *Aboriginal SF* you read will not contain one of my columns, but the sad report of how my dead body was discovered in the library, with the coroner's report claiming the cause of death was the ingestion of just one too many factoids. So please indulge me. I must purge myself.

But not get me wrong. This is not a totally self-indulgent act. I always have you, my scientifically curious reader, in mind. You will find these little factoid gems of im-

mense value. You can use them as the perfect pick-up lines at the corner bar, impress your boss with your scientific expertise, astound your mate and the kids with your mental prowess, and be able to monopolize the conversation around any water cooler in the western world. I guarantee that these have the power to transform your life.

The official boiling point of water was changed on January 1, 1990. Up until then it had always been 100 degrees Celsius. No longer. The world as we know it has forever been changed. The International Committee of Weights and Standards has decreed that water now boils at 99.97 degrees Celsius.

Lightning strikes in Florida are almost twice as energetic as those in New England, according to Richard Orville at the State University of New York at Albany. He determined this by analyzing five million lightning flashes during 1988 (busy guy). A Florida lightning strike will pack 45,000 amps. The reason behind this mind-boggling mystery is that clouds in Florida are larger than clouds in New England.

In the April 25 *Journal of the American Chemical Society*, D.S. Lawrence and T.V.S. Rao report making a molecule that is self-assembling — a diammonium salt with a hydrophobic region flanked by charged ammonium groups. This molecule will automatically thread its way into a starch-like molecule called a cyclodextrin and then cap itself with boron-centered molecules that look like wingnuts. This is equivalent to taking a box of broken glass, shaking it, and then looking in and finding a perfect wine goblet. In the future, self-assembling molecular structures may be used to create microscopic-sized machinery.

Amir Faghri at Wright State University reports making a new type of glove that will keep your fingers as warm as toast no matter how severe the blizzard you happen to find yourself in. The gloves have built-in heat pipes (a sealed container holding a liquid like Freon R12, which evaporates and condenses over a relatively narrow temperature range) that shunt heat from the relatively warmer elbow region to the colder fingertips. This is interesting technology. The same principle would allow you to build a heat engine in the ocean by taking advantage of the cold water deep below and the warm water at the surface.

United States babies dirty some 18 billion disposable diapers a year — this represents four percent of all household solid waste. Assuming that you could get 18 diapers (full) shoved into a box that was one foot by one foot by one foot, and then stacked each of those boxes on top of one another, the top box would be 200,000 miles above the surface of the Earth — that's just 50,000 miles short of the moon. I wonder if NASA has been informed of this.

Scientists believe that comet and meteor impacts on Mars may have actually blown pieces of Mars off the planet, and these chunks may have then fallen onto the Earth. They have three candidate rocks right now, named Shergotty, Nakhla, and Chassigny. Think about it. If rocks can come from Mars, they could come from anywhere. Remember the original Blob?

Supercooling is the ability of a liquid's temperature to be dropped below its freezing point, but to not actually solidify. Ultrapure water, which solidifies at zero degrees Cel-

sium, has been kept in its liquid state at temperatures two to three degrees below zero. Many liquids exhibit this phenomenon — including the blood of hibernating squirrels. However, the inverse phenomenon of superheating, in which an object would start to melt before it reaches its melting point, has not been observed. Ice simply will not melt below zero degrees Celsius. Why is this? I have no idea. If we can ever understand how the squirrel does its little trick, we may be able to deep-freeze people and shoot them off to some distant star.

Mars has absolutely no magnetic field. That's bad news for any colonization attempts. Earth's magnetic field keeps the sun's highly energetic debris from slamming into us. During solar flares, a Marsnaut would be fried.

It is widely known that carbon dioxide is building up in our atmosphere — this is one of the chief culprits of global warming. But other gases are also on the rise, such as methane, which will also cause global warming. It had been believed during the 1980s that the principal source of atmospheric methane was the belching of termites. But this has now been proven not to be true. It is estimated that the worldwide population of termites only belches 12 million-million grams of methane a year, which is only two percent of the methane released by all global sources. This error was due to underestimating the amount of methane absorbed in termite mounds. The real culprit in global methane buildup turns out to be the increase in cattle and sheep populations and their rather impolite tendency to pass a great deal of methane. Imagine what would happen if they ate beans.

It had generally been believed that schizophrenia was triggered during adolescence and during the early twenties. It was felt that, if you could get into your thirties without hearing voices and hallucinating, you were safe. But Dilip V. Jeste of the Veterans Administration Medical Center in San Diego says this is not true. This affliction can strike victims even in their fifties — however, it can be managed with drug doses much lower than those required by younger patients.

Light's top speed occurs when it travels in a vacuum. That has been one of the cornerstones of physics for many decades. But this is not quite true, according to Klaus Scharnhorst of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, as reported in *Physics Letters B*. If light in vacuum is passed between infinite parallel plates that are only one micron apart (there are 25,400 microns in one inch), the speed of light increases by 1 part in 10^{20} . That would be one part in one billion-billion-billion-billion — certainly not much, but if the speed of light can be al-

tered in this way by its environment, it may change the way that physicists view the universe.

Nothing at all.

Aerogels are substances that are also known as frozen smoke. They are produced by taking tetramethoxysilane (TMOS) and reacting it with oil and water to produce a solid substance of exceedingly low density. Aerogels can have densities as low as three milligrams per cubic centimeter, which is just a bit more than twice the density of air. These aerogels can be used to

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capture micrometeorites, or to hold fuel pellets in fusion reactors.

Radon is that radioactive gas that leaks up and gets trapped in your basement. Long-time exposure can cause such nasty things as lung cancer. And where is the worst place in the United States for radon? Iowa. I bet you don't see this little factoid in the tourist brochures.

To increase the rate of healing of sutured openings, Chi-chang Chu of Cornell University has found that placing thin strands of silver in stitches, and then running a current of a few millionths of an amp through them, makes wounds heal more quickly and be less prone to infection.

We all know *Tyrannosaurus rex*, that ultimate meat-eating dinosaur, featured in every prehistoric movie ever made. And I'm sure that you recall those feeble little front arms of his, those things that would twitch and claw harmlessly at the air. Well, they were not so feeble, according to M.B. Smith of Montana State and K. Carpenter of the Denver Museum of Natural History. After detailed skeletal examination, they determined those feeble little arms were capable of holding 426 pounds (that's right, not 427, but 426). Remember this the next time you encounter *T. rex*.

Broccoli is truly a wonder food. Not only is it high in compounds called idole glycosinolates, which have been shown in animal studies to reduce cancer risks, but four ounces of raw broccoli contain twice the amount of vitamin C as an equivalent amount of orange juice. But to get all that goodness out, you better not cook it, or else you'll lose half that vitamin C.

For quite some time, the standard age of the sun has been reported to be 4.7 billion years. But D.B. Guenther of Yale University reports in *Astrophysical Journal* that the true age of the sun is only 4.49 billion years. This correlates much better with the oldest meteorites found, which are believed to be 4.53 billion years old.

Do you like sushi? Do you like worms? Well, unfortunately, if you eat sushi, you're in all likelihood also ingesting worms. A report in the *Journal of Food Science* reports on the details of a 10-megahertz ultrasound scanning system that is

seven times more sensitive at detecting sealworms than visual inspection. I suggest that you check with your sushi chef to see if this new state-of-the-art device is being used on that chunk of raw flesh you are about to shove in your mouth.

Trilobites were crustacean-like creatures that swam the seas some 500 million years ago. Now only their fossils remain. And there is a very interesting thing about those fossils. Of the trilobites that were partially eaten by predators, as evidenced by bite scars, some 69 percent of those bites occurred on the right side while only 27 percent

exhibit bites on the left side (I know this only adds up to 96 percent — I assume that the other 4 percent were chomped on both sides). This evidence of a handedness preference for something chomping trilobites on the right side is the earliest known example of behavioral asymmetry — the tendency to use right and left sides of the body differently.

Amino-acid racemization is a technique used to date ostrich eggshells that can be used to date early human sites (where these eggs were consumed) that were occupied up to

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one million years ago. This technique is based on the fact that after an organism dies, its amino acids realign themselves at a slow, relatively uniform rate to form a mirror image of their original molecular structure. This technique uses the proportion of the two structures as a biological clock. By way of comparison, conventional radiocarbon dating can only extend back 40,000 years. I know this makes me think twice about those eggshells I threw away yesterday, and who might be digging through my fossilized garbage a million years from now.

The culprit for armpit odor has finally been identified by George Preti at the Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia. The offensive chemical compound is 3-methyl-2-hexonic acid. It is interesting to note that this turns out to be the same compound that provides the primary odor component of extract from the anal sac of a type of Japanese weasel. I suggest taking a shower before encountering Japanese weasels during mating season.

And finally, but certainly not of any lesser significance than everything else you've already read, is the fact that since 1966, Norwegian biologists have documented alarming population losses of the common European toad, *Bufo bufo*, on islands in the outer regions of Oslo's fjord.

Thank you.

I feel so much better.

This is just a microscopic slice of the chaos and debris that fill my head, but just unloading these few factoids bolsters my spirits and gives me the courage to think about my next column.

Thanks for your help, and, if you would like to start stuffing your own head with such wondrous factoids, I might suggest that you read a marvelous publication (where I stumbled across most of these valuable tidbits over the past two years) called *Science News*, which is a weekly publication, just chock full of what's what and who's who in the world of science. At \$34.50 per year, it's an outstanding bargain. You can subscribe by writing to Science Service, 1719 N Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036. □

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Yesteryear

Since space is limited for this column, I'd just like to welcome *Interzone* readers to this cultural exchange.

To whet your appetite, we'll be serving up a sixties revival, more news on Stephen King adaptations, the continuing saga of the Cameron and Spielberg boys, the summer blockbusters, and, in the "more of the same" department, the sequels.

But first, the appetizers.

Television

Although Fox television cancelled the *Alien Nation* series, the fate of the Francisco family will be resolved in the first of two proposed TV movies designed to tie up the loose ends from the season's cliffhanger.

Two other Fox television movies being shot are *Robin Hood*, starring Patrick Bergin and Uma Thurman, and *The Omen IV*, in which more Antichrist antics are brought to light. Both will be aired sometime this year.

To rival the big three networks, Fox and Warner Bros. have made a \$62-million deal for three animated children's series. *Beetlejuice* will debut in the fall of 1991 with the first of 65 new episodes. The series will run Monday to Friday. (Currently, ABC has a *Beetlejuice* series airing on Saturday mornings; this will not conflict with the Fox show.) *Tazmania*, featuring the Looney Tunes' Tasmanian devil, will kick off with 13 episodes for fall '91, 13 more for the fall '92 season, and culminate in 39 additional episodes for fall '93 or '94. The new *Batman* series will piggyback on the expected success of the second *Batman* film, tentatively scheduled for summer '92.

Talking of *Batman*, *New York* magazine reported that Anton Furst, who won the Academy Award for art directing *Batman*, will design Planet Hollywood, a 250-seat restaurant in New York for Hard Rock Cafe entrepreneur Robert Earl and partners. A summer opening is planned.

Tim Curry, who was the scarier manifestation of Stephen King's *It*, will provide the voice of Captain Hook in a new animated show, *The Never-told Tales of Peter Pan*.

In development is a prime-time animated *Darkman* series for NBC, utilizing the talents of *Blade Runner* director Ridley Scott and *Twilight Zone*'s J. Michael Straczynski. For the syndication market, *Tarzan* will swing back into live action with a projected 125 new half-hour episodes to be produced in Canada.

Rutger Hauer will star in an original TV-movie for HBO called *Wedlock*. The plot for this futuristic thriller revolves around two inmates who escape from a high-tech prison only to find themselves physically joined for life. Mimi Rogers and Joan Chen co-star.

Kevin Peter Hall, who suited up for both the *Predator* films and *Harry and the Hendersons*, will reprise his role as Bigfoot for the TV version of *Harry*. Bruce Davison will play the head of the Henderson family.

Conan Doyle's creation will return to the small screen in two four-hour miniseries and 22 one-hour episodes under the banner of *The Golden Years of Sherlock Holmes*. Christopher Lee will play Holmes, and *Avengers* star Patrick Macnee will play Watson.

Movies

Using the idea that "everything old is new again," filmmakers are taking Sixties television series and giving them a 35mm makeover. Four series are making the transition from small screen to silver screen. In the early stages of development is a feature production of *Land of the Giants*, to be lensed in Russia. The film will reunite the original cast.

The Addams Family started shooting in November. Bull's-eye casting includes Raul Julia as Gomez, Anjelica Huston as Morticia, and Christopher Lloyd as Uncle Fester.

January saw the start date of *The Fugitive*. This time, the problem of



catching that damned elusive one-armed man goes to Alec Baldwin (*Beetlejuice*). Waiter Hill will direct.

Officers Toody and Muldoon are back in the guise of David Johansen (Gunther Toody) and John McInley (Francis Muldoon) in *Car 54, Where Are You?* Reprising their roles from the original series are Al Lewis as Officer Leo Schnausner and Nipsey Russell as Officer Anderson. The cast includes Daniel Baldwin (brother of Alec).

The classics are still popular with filmmakers: Menachem Golan's company, 21st Century Film Corp., and the Soviet Union's Lenfilm are co-financing a \$3-million version of Poe's *The Raven*, to be shot in Russia. Music for the film will be provided by the Leningrad Philharmonic. (Currently in production from 21st Century is the screen adaptation of *Spider-Man*.)

New Age Entertainment is working on film versions of H.P. Lovecraft's stories *The Thing on the Doorstep* and *The Unnameable II: The Statement of Randolph Carter*. Both are produced and directed by Jean-Paul Ouellette.

In an effort to bring back the Renaissance for film viewers, the Troma company has outdone itself with yet another Grade-A demento called *Stranger Dreams: Invasion of the Space Preachers*. The film is described as "an adventure movie that pits a delirious dentist, a pencil-wielding accountant and a shapely space woman against an egotistical intergalactic evangelist." Something for everyone here.

Disney's as yet untitled sequel to *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* will start filming in April. This time, accident-prone Wayne Szalinski (Rick Moranis) enlarges his new baby. (Does Child Welfare know about this man?) Release date for the film is

1992; this coincides with the expected release date of the *Batman* sequel. (The original Disney movie cleverly opened the same weekend as the first *Batman* movie and did phenomenally well.)

While Disney is working on more *Roger Rabbit* shorts as an added attraction for their major box-office films, Marvel Productions and 20th Century Fox are getting in on the act with a series of new animated shorts called *Fox Toons*. To be screened in advance of Fox films, starting summer '91, *Toons* will feature all new characters.

And, not forgetting the Disney old-timers, July will see the re-release of *101 Dalmatians*.

Ed Naha, screenplay writer for *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, has sold an original script titled *The Unknown Soldier* to Guber/Peters Entertainment for an estimated \$850,000.

Full Moon Entertainment and Chairman Charles Band have slated eight new genre films (each conservatively budgeted between \$2.5 and \$6 million), to be made over a period of a year.

First out of the starter's block was the previously announced *Trancers II*. Band himself will produce and direct this \$3.5-million feature, with Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo (developers of *The Flash* series) serving as creative consultants. The rest of the Full Moon lineup includes two fantasy-horror features, *Netherworld* and *Arcade*; *Dollman*, which the company hopes will be the first in a series of films about a doll-sized superhero with the strength of a grown man; *Hybrids*, in which a group of explorers finds a world of genetically-altered dinosaurs; *Bad Channels*, a horror-fantasy-musical; and two films written by Dennis Paoli and directed by Stuart Gordon of *Re-Animator* notoriety. (Paoli and Gordon will next make their mark on the impending *The Pit* and *The Pendulum*.)

Films in production:

It's a dark time for pencils everywhere. "Friends of the Graphites" have made it known that they will boycott the production when that beloved gum eraser makes his bid for celluloid stardom in *The Gumby Movie*. The man behind the rubber mask is creator Art Clokey.

On a lighter side, for the children there is *An American Tail 2*, this time featuring the voices of James Stewart,

John Cleese, Dom DeLuise, and Amy Irving. Producers are Steven Spielberg and Robert Watts; the script is by Flint Dille.

Howard Chaykin has written the screenplay for the *Judge Dredd* movie.

Steven Spielberg and Andrew Lloyd Webber are working on an animated *Cats* for the theatrical market.

January saw the start of filming for *The Invisible Man*, script by George R.R. Martin, and the remake of John Wyndham's novel, *Village of the Damned*, this time written and directed by Tom Holland.

Clive Barker's *Hell on Earth: Hellraiser III* went into pre-production in December. Shooting will commence early this year.

Mick Garris, co-creator of *She-Wolf of London*, has signed a deal to write *The Mummy* with Clive Barker for MCA/Universal. Garris will also be executive producer with Richard Christian Matheson on a vampire story, *Red Sleep*, sold to Silver Pictures and Warner Bros.

Warner Bros. seems to have blood-sucking on its mind — it has bought a second vampire screenplay called *Innocent Blood*.

One of the most popular fables from *The Arabian Nights* will have two upcoming screen versions. Walt Disney Pictures is making the animated musical *Aladdin*, with music and lyrics by *The Little Mermaid*'s Howard Ashman and Alan Menken. And a live-action musical of *Aladdin* will be directed by Mickey Dolen; the cast includes Barry Bostwick and Donna McKechnie.

The cameras are due to start rolling in spring '91 for both *Moontrap 2: The Pyramids of Mars* and *Star Trek VI*.

Evil Dead 3 is in preparation, reuniting that fun-loving team of Sam Raimi (*Darkman*) and Bruce Campbell.

Rehearsals for the film version of *Phantom of the Opera*, with Michael Crawford and Sarah Brightman, will begin in June or July.

James Cameron will direct *The Minds of Billy Milligan*, adapted from the Daniel Keyes non-fiction novel about a rapist with multiple personalities.

(A small aside — Cameron, Gale Anne Hurd, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and special-effects supervisor Stan

Winston have sued Hemdale and Orion for alleged non-payment of net profit participations on *The Terminator*. This is the second lawsuit Cameron and Hurd have instigated against a film company.)

Now that *Highlander 2* is completed, Christopher Lambert will star in *Knight Moves*, in which he plays a Grand Master chess player brought in by the police to help catch a psychopathic serial killer.

Principal photography will start early this year for *Still Wanted: Dead or Alive*, with Rutger Hauer and *Children of the Corn: The Awakening*, a sequel to the Stephen King story.

Publisher's Weekly reported that writer Ron Bass, who picked up the Oscar for *Rain Man*, has garnered a healthy \$2 million to write the screenplay for *Manhattan Ghost*, based on the novel by T.M. Wright.

Writers Barry Taff and Kenneth Stoller have lost their \$45-million lawsuit in which they claimed that Christopher Reeve, Warner Bros., and the Cannon Group used their movie treatment, "Superman: The Confrontation," as a basis for *Superman IV*. They plan an appeal.

A big birthday bash is planned next year for Christopher Columbus. The movies are celebrating the 500th year of the discovery of America with two heavyweight versions of the Columbus story. Billing it as the film event of the decade (their words, not mine), Alexander and Ilya Salkind Productions will give us the snappily titled *Christopher Columbus: The Movie*, written by *The Godfather*'s Mario Puzo, while Due West Productions is going with the unnumbered *Christopher Columbus*, to be directed by Ridley Scott from a screenplay by Roselyne Bosch.

Calendar dates for the summer films (USA):

March	<i>The Return of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles</i> .
May	<i>Nightmare on Elm Street: Freddy's Dead</i>
June	<i>Rocketeer</i> <i>Billy Bathgate</i> (based on E.L. Doctorow's novel)
July	<i>Terminator 2: Judgment Day</i> <i>101 Dalmatians</i>

And lastly, following in the footsteps of the Divine Garbo, Tom and Jerry will talk in their next full-length feature film! □

Dear Mr. Ryan, Crazy Alien, and Co.,

Please, oh please, may *Aboriginal Science Fiction* succeed. I enjoy it very much, and there aren't very many fiction magazines that I like.

"Coyote on Mars" was terrific. One of my favorite themes is, how do people react when they are pushed to their limits? Balls to the wall? Chests in a wringer? I also like it when people who think they are powerless suddenly discover they have some major leverage, after all. Someday all the little peons, the clerks and secretaries and construction workers, are going to awaken to the fact that they have the real power. I picture a data-entry worker changing security codes and job titles and replacing every member of Congress with janitors and street people.

Carla Schroder
Lynnwood, WA

Dear Sir,

Generally, I like your magazine. The stories are pretty good, and I especially enjoy the information in the columns. Here are some things, though, I like less well.

I would rather that the stories did not have illustrations. One of the main reasons I read is to form my own mental images to accompany the images in the story. I find that if the images presented by the illustrator conflict with my images, I am distracted and put off.

For the same reasons, I would like to see you drop the pictures of the authors and artists. Aside from the fact that the photos are not good, I keep seeing the authors as characters in their stories. (I can't read a Perry Mason without seeing Raymond Burr. I find this disconcerting.) I am glad, though, that you don't follow the practice of other SF magazines and hang the author's bio and a description of the story I'm about to read at the beginning of each story. Information about the story is unnecessary, and information about the authors can be kept separate — as you do.

Finally, a word on the plastic wrap controversy. Use kraft paper. I get several magazines that use brown paper as a protective wrapper, and they all seem to arrive intact.

Clifford Abrams
Evanston, IL

(We have explored the possibility of using kraft paper, but it is more expensive than plastic and does not protect the magazine against bad weather or high-speed postal machinery. — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I just spent the morning contemplating the deeper implications of my novel and reading *Aboriginal SF* for the first time. *Molto bravo!* 'nuf said. Ass kissers make me nervous.

Questions:

To Susan Ellison: Any relation to Harlan? (*She is his wife. — Ed.*)

When is the World SFCON? I live in Germany and wanna go. (*Chicon V, the 49th World SF Convention, will be held Aug. 29 to Sept. 2, 1991, at the Hyatt Regency hotel, Chicago, Illinois, USA. Hal Clement and Richard Powers are the guests of honor. The Aboriginal staff will also attend. Memberships are \$125 until June 15, 1991, \$150 after that. Send your check to: Chicon V, Box 218121, Upper Arlington, OH 43221, USA. — Ed.*)

God knows I don't expect a reply, but, while I'm bending your ear, here's a few disembodied remarks about *Aboriginal SF* and the world in general.

Why doesn't the issue number appear on the cover? (*It does now. — Ed.*) I found it purely by accident.

Why do you bother splitting up short stories and continuing them on page X? "The spell" is so fragile, making me search for the ending sometimes breaks it, and I go back to work. (*The locations of color plates on the printing press force us to jump stories so as to make best use of the color. Digests, which don't use color on inside pages, don't have that problem. — Ed.*)

The letter from Philip C. Jennings of St. Cloud, MN, makes me wonder. If there actually is demographic proof somewhere that yuppies read the fiction mags, why don't you show it to somebody in business, for God's sake. Get yourselves a raise and save the endangered art of short fiction writing. (*Major advertisers usually want circulation figures of 500,000 or more. — Ed.*)

The "art" (paintings, drawings)

may be just as important as the stories. You're doing more than illustrating or "interfering with imagination." By buying it, you're directly supporting the creation of the visual arts. I applaud the idea and love the pictures. Please keep it up.

I know you guys are very busy, but I wanted to write and let you know I'm on board (big, BIG ego). Incidentally, you may be seeing some of my work one of these days. Condolences.

Good luck and best wishes,
James T. Hughes III
APO New York, NY

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I've discovered new information that has deepened my appreciation for "Three Boston Artists," my candidate for best *Aboriginal* story for 1990.

It seems that the people of India have much the same attitude toward art as the Phner. Art that is created for Hindu rituals is destroyed immediately afterward, and the Hindus use a word for this destruction that also means creation.

Some fans might say that I am diminishing the story's impact by letting them know that the Phner aren't truly alien. I disagree with this view. I have never seen a successfully created alien race in science fiction that didn't hark back to some human culture. If a species is so alien that no human points of reference are available, we couldn't identify with them.

I see my knowledge of the Hindu attitude toward art as opening up a whole new level in "Three Boston Artists." It reminds me that for most Westerners, the cultures of the East are as alien as a race of extraterrestrials would be. I wonder if Sarah Smith intended this message. If so, she ought to be commended.

It's rare to find a story that raises as many important questions as "Three Boston Artists." Needless to say, I am going to continue reading your magazine in the hopes that you will publish another story as fine as that one.

In Unity and Diversity,
Linda Frankel
Oakland, CA

□

Darkness Upon the Face of the Deep

By Harlan Ellison

Art by Paul Chadwick

Morning of the day after All Hallow's Eve dawned with a brightness that cast orange and rose light over the mountain of Hindustan. Hysteria seemed to have possessed the birds: they rose in a canopy, spreading their great patchwork wings, proclaiming in a minor key another year of safety.

In the valley shadowed beneath the grandfather mountain could be heard the sound of nails being prised from the heavy slats used to board up the villagers' windows. And the laugh of the first adventurous child as he held his nose and yanked off the wreath of malodorous henbane protecting a front door. The fountain had been unplugged and its music rose toward the black thorn of the escarpment. The nilgai, sheep, and goats had been chivvied together, in the shallow caves where they had been secreted; and now the shepherd girls drove them up the ramps from underground. Fresh flowers were laid on the pedestals of the thirty-two idols circling the rustic plaza.

When the mountain of Hindustan creaked, and then rumbled, the villagers paused in their activities, relief drained from their faces, and they turned to stare up at the dark spire.

Slowly, then more rapidly, the face of the mountain showed a fissure. The rent widened and very softly from within the crevice a sooty shadow began to seep out. It could not be said to shine — it was an absence of illumination — but it spilled out into the air and scintillated, neither smoke nor fog.

The mountain split.

The villagers had held silent for longer than might have been prudent, but when the shapes began soaring out of the great black wound, rising in a cloud to throw a blade-shaped shadow across the sun, a covey of snakelike, winged blood bats, they knew they had been falsely lulled into thinking danger had passed. One of the gods had lied, or the seer had miscalculated the year.

Then they screamed, the music died, and they rushed to replace the boards across their windows.

In the Deccan, on the plateau that lies between what were known as the Narbada and Kristna rivers, some of the oldest men and only three of the very oldest women remember the stories passed down through many generations, of the village of Antagarh. Not the tiny village of that name to be found on maps of the present day, but the original Antagarh, where the sigil of even more ancient days had been hidden. Where all in a morning the darkness descended, and feasted, and finally lifted, leaving only one child.

This little boy, possessing sight only in his left eye, had been lost on the face of the mountain (it is said), and thus escaped the fate that befell his village. (It is said.)

No mother, no father, no home waiting at his return later that day (for Antagarh no longer existed; just a plain of pumice on which nothing grew for three hundred years; no blade of grass, no weed, no shrub; where no line of dawn

sunlight passed again). The child crawled through the gray dust and saw a cloud of black wings rising away from the valley, snake bat shapes climbing toward the staring idiot's eye of the sun.

Alone, he lay in the wasteland and watched as his past disappeared. His future: sailing toward him borne on the wind that blows forever between the stars, the wind that carries ancient and encoded messages of indecipherable night.

On rare, perfect nights when the stars had swung into extraordinary alignments unnoticed by dozing humanity, the glyph would slowly begin to glow. As if breathing deeply with the light from stellar lamps, the engraved stone seal would become lambent, radiating warmth through its deep orange surface. The signs stood out perfectly, barely smoothed by erosion: circles, crescents, hooks, human heads, hands, and designs that were neither animal nor human. A coherent script utterly beyond understanding, giving itself up to no known mechanical system of decipherment. The radiance stronger as night deepened.

They were hiding in the ruins of the sphinx gate at Alaja Hüyük, waiting for the Syrian mercenary in the employ of the Israeli *Mossad*, who was coming with supplies from Damascus to guide them to Mamoula, when they perceived the light of the glyph. They held it and marveled, somewhat fearful, but now certain that they were onto something significant.

Bobby Shafka said, "Is it warm?"

Loder shook his head. "Not at all." He passed it over and Shafka held it in his palm, then placed his other hand over it. He nodded agreement.

The glyph grew brighter. "It's like that little mirror you use to keep your pipe lit," Shafka said.

Dennis Loder drew deeply at the sandblast briar. Sweet silver smoke trailed up against the cool night. He reached into one of the many pockets of the sleeveless thermal vest and took out the pipe mirror. It was called a Micro-Sun, and it was a device so simple, yet so extraordinary, that it made one think it was some incredibly ancient device rediscovered in modern times. A disc the size of a half dollar, it was only a concave, highly-burnished gold circle set into plastic. But when held over the dying dottle in the heel of the bowl, it reflected and concentrated the pipe's own heat back into the bowl and renewed the burn. Loder laid it atop the mouth of the briar and took three short puffs. The smoke thickened.

"No, not exactly like it," he said. But he knew what Bobby meant: both of the devices seemed magical. Then he raised a hand to stop conversation. "Is that the man?"

"I didn't hear anything," Shafka said, covering the glyph so its light would not pool out from them. They sat

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with their backs to the cooling stones and listened. "Did you hear something?"

Loder waited a moment, listening; then he relaxed again. "I guess not. But he should have come already, don't you think?"

Shafka smiled. "This really isn't your line of work, is it?"

"I told you that when you conned me into coming."

"Little late for regrets, don't you think?"

"Dead is what we can get if any of the brotherhood finds us. I'm not like you; I'm a shard digger, a pencil-pusher. You've been trying to get me in trouble for thirty years. I was doing pretty good at resisting your blandishments..."

"Until I promised you fame and fortune?"

"Until you preyed on my childhood weakness for movies about sunken treasure and lost cities."

They had been friends all their lives, had grown up three houses apart on the same street, Dunster Road in York, Pennsylvania. Dennis had been the milder of the pair, bookish and shy, tall for his age at any age, and determined to become an archaeologist; Bobby Shafka had gotten into trouble the first time (as best as Dennis could remember) in grade school: he had somehow, impossibly, manhandled a three hundred pound rotary mower buggy up four flights of stairs from the groundskeeper's shed, to the roof of the school building, worked it to the edge, and precariously balanced it there, slowly tipping back and forth over oblivion. The secret dream he had shared only with his best pal, Dennis Loder, was to become the captain of a tramp steamer, plying dark and dangerous waters, like Wolf Larsen in the Jack London novel.

Dennis had gotten his degree at Syracuse University, his master's at Cambridge; he had worked digs in Iraq — including Nippur, Nimrud, Tell al Rimah and Choga Mami — and in 1980 had assisted on the site at Tell Brak, here in Syria; but he had been the less adventurous of the pals, and he had gone on staff at the National Geographic Society magazine.

Bobby Shafka had conned and gladhanded his way into a scholarship at Wharton, made a few contacts, dropped out after a year and a half, signed on as a flack for the pulpwood industry, working out of their Manhattan association offices, made a few contacts, moved up to a middle-management position with the largest lithographing conglomerate on the East Coast, made a few contacts, went into partnership with a triad of young attorneys who had opened a hot private club in TriBeCa, made a few contacts, and cut a deal for time served and testimony with the D.A.'s office when the triad was busted holding two and a half million street-value crystal meth and Bangkok heroin.

Bobby had made no serviceable contacts in a holding cell for sixteen weeks, and now he was back at starters, hustling a main chance. He was under contract to *The National Enquirer* to unearth a four-thousand-year-old Hittite tomb in Mamoula, based entirely on his ability to con and gladhand the expatriate Aussie associate editor ... and his possession of the authenticated glyph. Which he had come to hold ... having made a few contacts.

And he had conned his best friend Dennis Loder into coming with him, to a country that had excelled for more than twenty years in the spawning of terrorists pledged to kill every American they could set eyes on. It hadn't

been easy; but when Bobby promised to give Dennis the first publication rights for *National Geographic*, and let him have the glyph studied, and showed him the irrefutable proof that the glyph had been turned up in 1872 with the discovery of the Hamah Stones of the Hittites (and had been kept secret by Subhi Pasha, known in Europe as Subhi Bey before his appointment to Damascus), Dennis had been seduced by the towering ghosts of Schliemann, Rawlinson, Belzoni, Carter, and Lord Carnarvon — and Saturday afternoon movies — and he had joined with his dangerous old pal on their first adventure since the old neighborhood.

Curiously enough, it had not been Loder's association with the Geographic Society that had effected the impossible task of smuggling two Americans into forbidden lands. It had been the *Enquirer's* far-flung network of snitches, *paparazzi*, palace servants, ex-CIA agents, mercenaries, and turncoats-for-hire that had put together the route. They had come in by way of Dubai and Bahrain, across the neutral zone between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and northwest across the desolate Al-Ha-Arah — it had taken six weeks, done so circuitously — to the penultimate drop-off at Alaja Hüyük where they would be met tonight by the man they had heard called Yaffa Al-Mansur. (He had also been referred to, during their journey, as Ibrahim ibn Abd-an-Nasr, Abu Rumaneh, Ibrahim At-Turki, Bashar Al-Sherrif, Homa Bakhtiari, and even Shain, though Bobby swore when he had first been recommended to them by the Aussie associate editor, he had called him Abdullah.)

But Yaffa Al-Mansur was now a full day late. They had been hiding in the ancient stones through the blistering heat since dawn, waiting. And now it was night, and they were alone; and the engraved stone seal that had brought them half across the world to find an impossible secret had begun to glow.

Bobby opened his hand and the light illuminated the ground around them. Loder gestured with the stem of his pipe. "This is something we didn't count on."

"I suppose I should be freaked," Shafka said. "But it's kind of, I don't know, kind of thrilling. Know what I mean?"

Loder chuckled. "Should make one superlative headline for that rag of yours: *Ancient Aliens Leave Deadly Laser Stone!* If you can find some woman who'll swear she was impregnated by the alien who left it, and she's discovered by amniocentesis that she's going to give birth to a baby with two heads that look like James Dean and Elvis Presley, you'll never have to work another day in your life."

Bobby made a rueful face. "From your lips to the ears of whatever gods are engraved on this stone. I'm so broke I couldn't buy hairpins for a goldfish."

"If the tomb is there; and if it's 2000-1300 B.C.; and if those gods are still around and can hear us, try praying to Karhuha, Sarka, and the goddess Kúpapa. Even the Phoenicians held them in high regard." And he intoned:

*Great old Hittites left this here,
How long ago is still unknown.
The world is breathless, that is clear.
There is nothing like the lion stone!*

Bobby said, "And that is what...?"

"From the lion stone at Karatepe. We don't know as much as we need to know about the Hittites. That's why I'm with you."

"Sitting in the dirt in the middle of the Moslem brotherhood, waiting for a man possibly named Yaffa..."

"Or Abu, or Abdullah, or Bashar, or Shain..."

Bobby picked up the chant. "Or Manny, Moe, or Jack."

Loder revived the glow in his pipe with the little golden disc and said, "Do you know what 'Syria' means?" Bobby shook his head. "Trick question," Dennis said. "Uncertain origin. No one knows what it means. There was a country named *Suri* in Asia Minor, mentioned in Mesopotamian cuneiform script, about 4000 B.C. Not likely it's the Greek abbreviation of *Assyria*. We find this tomb that probably doesn't exist, and we might get our best clues."

Bobby clenched his hand around the glyph. "I'm about to shine it on with this thing. We could still be sitting here at the turn of the century. He's not coming."

The voice came from behind and above them. "Ah, but he is here, great gentlemen." They jerked with terror, and spun half around, looking for the speaker who had come upon them without a sound.

He stood on the carved stones above them, and looked down, his face hidden in the shadows. He seemed taller and more formidable than some Arab double-agent. He seemed to be an emissary of the ancient gods whose names Loder had invoked.

But when he climbed down, they saw that he was just a man. An almost perfectly square man, nearly as wide as he was tall, with plump cheeks and a spotty beard. "Yaffa Al-Mansur, strictly as advertised," he said, pronouncing it *advertize-ed*.

"You're late," Bobby said, dropping his voice into the range he used for inept switchboard operators.

Yaffa waved away the comment, settled down between them, and pulled a pop-lid tin of pudding from his djellabah. He produced a folding military-issue spoon, yanked off the lid of the pudding tin, and began eating. "I have been snaking and moving, great gentlemen. Taking roads where no roads exist, ducking and dogging —"

"I think you mean 'dodging'," Loder said.

"... ah! Even so. And as a regrettable consequential, I confess to a fractional tardiness." He paused, spooned pudding into the foliage of his beard, then said: "And pray kindly tell me, great gentlemen, which among the multitude many is your favorite American blues guitarist?"

They stared at him. The stars shone like ice, the glyph lay in Bobby's hand brightly lit, the distant slicing of a jackal's cry echoed past them, and they stared.

"For my own good self," Yaffa said, "there was none more exalted than Blind Lemon Jefferson, though I now and yon feel that Son House was the nonpareil of Delta blues. And which of them whom you adore is your favorites, great sirs?"

Two hours later, after Yaffa had relieved himself and slept, they moved out. Toward Mamoula, that their guide called Ma'alula, 33°50'N, 36°33'E, where speaking neither Arabic nor Kurdish would be of any help. For in Mamoula, in the mountains, though they have lost the ability over the centuries to write it, the hidden residents speak the Aramaic of Jesus's time, precisely as the Christ spoke it. Toward Mamoula, carrying the light.

These were the direct descendants of the Hittite Em-

pire that had ruled the Levant till the end of the Late Bronze Age. Craggy men naked beneath their djellababs, their curved knives hanging by a thong across their chests and below their armpits; wearing the traditional skullcaps; sandals or hand-made boots according to their occupation. Dark eyes studying the two infidels and the intruder from some great city in the lowlands — Hamath, or even Damascus, of which they had heard. These were the blood of the Akhlamu, and the Arameans; sinew of Canaanites and the Aramean neo-Hittites who crushed Shalmaneser III at the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C.

They had driven through the night and late into the next day. There had been a Land Rover, fully stocked; even to several bottles of San Pellegrino and Vichy water. Yaffa had babbled happily of Lightnin' Hopkins and Lonnie Johnson, and of having worked briefly with Malkin of the *Mossad*, who had walked up to the fugitive Eichmann on Garibaldi Street in Buenos Aires in 1960 and said, "*Un momento, señor*." Bobby Shafka had slept fitfully, unable to find a place for his spine; and Dennis sat silently (save when he was forced to make a sound in response to Yaffa's paeans in praise of Tampa Red's left hand). He smoked his pipe and held the glyph, and found himself sinking deeper and deeper into fear. This was more than stone. What had he been thinking of, to let Bobby suck him in this way?

The Rover hit a scree as they began their shallow ascent, and Loder was knocked against the door with enough force to jam his crazybone. He gave a yelp. Bobby slept on. Yaffa chuckled lightly, navigated through the sheet of coarse debris mantling the mountain slope, and spoke softly to his shotgun passenger.

"Will you be taking treasures from the land, Dr. Loder?"

There was none of the punkah-wallah "sahib" burlesque in his voice now. He spoke flawless English, with only the faintest trace of the Levant.

Loder looked at him. Yaffa's face was faintly lit by the dial glow from the dashboard. His features were sharper now; almost nothing left of the simpering pouch-cheeked caricature that had found them near the sphinx gate. "Perhaps," Loder answered. They rode in silence for a while, then Dennis said, "I was wondering when you'd divest yourself of the funnyface."

"A man must play many parts to survive, Doctor."

"And what will you do with these treasures ... should they exist?"

"I'll take them back and use them to help decipher the history of the land, and the people who came and went here."

"You know Hafez al-Assad has decreed death on the spot for archaeological pilferage. This does not frighten you?"

"Yes, it frightens me."

"But not as much as you are frightened by that glowing stone seal in your vest pocket, do I perceive correctly?"

Loder placed the little golden pipe mirror atop the bowl and puffed the tobacco to a cheery glow.

"That has a marvelous bouquet," Yaffa said, watching the ruts that served as road, skirting the talus at the foot of a steep declivity. "Oriental tobaccos? Latakia; perique, perhaps?"

Loder shook his head. "One whiff of latakia and I'm on my back. No, it's just some Virginia, and a nice toasted

cavendish. Why have you revealed yourself to me, and not to my partner?"

"Because I think you have been duped by friendship. I think that you regret this expedition, that you are a decent sort of man; and I know you are frightened."

"You saw the glyph glowing?"

"Yes. When I found you. I was above you, studying you, for many minutes before I declared myself."

"And you don't much care for Bobby, is that it?"

Yaffa shrugged. "He is like most men. He lives on the edge of the moment. He is like the dust. It lies a while, then is blown away."

"He's my friend. We grew up together. I hope whoever hired you to guide us can count on your fidelity to both of us. We're in your hands, you know."

Yaffa turned his head for a moment. He looked at Loder, and said, "Yes, I know that. And we are all three in the hands of Allah."

"Does Allah have any knowledge of this stone seal? Some random bit of minutiae that might make our little journey safer and more productive?"

The Syrian brought the Land Rover to a slow, smooth stop. He turned in his seat and stared at Loder. "I was paid to come and meet you, to take you to Ma'alula where, I was told, you will put to advantage some information as to the location of a very old Hittite tomb. I was told no more than that, and in truth, I need know nothing more. But now I have seen this strange compass you follow; and I say this to you, Dr. Loder: if it were I, my fear would send me in another direction. Where we go is not merely into the mountains. Where we go is back in time. These people live as they lived four thousand years ago, for the most part. They have been touched by civilization, but it is a gentle, not a lingering touch. What they know, they know in their blood and bones. And if there were not others depending on me for the money I have been paid, I would never have spoken to you back at the broken stones. I would have slipped away and left you to fend for yourselves."

He stared out the windscreen and added, "My greatest fear is that Allah may feel the need to close his hands around us harshly." And in a silent moment he shifted out of neutral, into low, and began climbing once more.

Now it was day, and they moved carefully through the hard-packed clay of Mamoula's only street. Above them the mountains loomed painfully, old men with arthritis.

No one spoke to them. Women carrying early morning water in leather sacks stepped between the wattle-and-daub buildings to avoid them. But they were watched. They passed three small children playing in a mud puddle. An impossibly old man sitting on a stool in front of a house, holding a crooked staff as if it were a symbol of office, closed his eyes and feigned sleep as they detoured toward him. They retreated to the center of the street. Each time Yaffa approached a man, young or old, to ask a question — the object of his attention turned his back and walked away.

At last, they stood at the foot of the rutted trail that climbed from the end of the village street, through talus slides, into the higher mountain passes. They had gone from one end of Mamoula to the other, and there was no help.

Yaffa said to Loder, "I know how to do this. Will you let

me do what is necessary?"

Bobby answered. "Do what you have to do."

Loder said, "It doesn't entail hurting anyone, does it?"

"No," Yaffa said. "I have children of my own."

"Just do it, man," Bobby said urgently. "I didn't come all this way to go back empty. This is it for me!"

Yaffa turned and walked back down the street as the eyes of the town followed. Bobby and Dennis stood where they were and watched. Yaffa went to the children playing in the mudhole, stooped, and lifted a five-year-old little girl high in the air over his head. The child, taken by surprise, was dumfounded for a moment, then laughed as the squat, cherubic stranger whirled her around high above. She laughed and laughed, until the mother came running from one of the houses, shrieking in a lost tongue. Yaffa stood his ground as the woman flew at him. He set the child on his shoulder and raised a hand to stop the woman. Here and there on the street others took a step toward the intruder; then they waited. He had the child.

Yaffa spoke quickly and earnestly to the woman. Neither Dennis nor Bobby understood a word. Bobby leaned toward Loder and whispered, "What language?" Dennis shook his head. "Not Arabic, not Kurdish. I don't know. It may be Aramaic, or some dialect that's transitional. I've only heard Aramaic spoken once, at a university lecture. It didn't sound anything like that. I have no idea what he's saying ... but I can guess."

He paused. "If the woman brings a man to him, I think I know what's going on."

As if to Loder's surmise, the woman turned toward a group of men halfway down the street. She took several steps toward them, and one of the younger men shouted to her. She stopped, looked back at Yaffa and the child, as if insuring their immobility, and then shouted back something to the young man.

In a moment, after hurried conversation in the group, the young man strode manfully to Yaffa, stood before him, and held out his arms for the little girl. The child, gurgling at her father, was content to perch on Yaffa's shoulder.

Yaffa spoke softly but at length to the young man.

Finally, the man nodded, and indicated Yaffa should follow him. Yaffa gestured to Bobby and Dennis to come; and he turned and walked along behind the young man; toward the ancient on the stool before the rude domicile. The young man went to the withered elder, kneeled before him deferentially, and spoke passionately. The old man listened for a time, then stopped the younger with a raised finger. He looked up, directly at Yaffa, and nodded almost imperceptibly. Yaffa instantly handed the child to the woman dogging his footsteps.

The family rushed away, and Yaffa motioned Shafka and Loder to follow him as the old man slowly and painfully rose and went into the hut. They followed.

The Land Rover was abandoned two days' climb into the Qalamun Sinnir. The two guides assigned by Mamoula's oldest resident had been terrified of the vehicle, and they had ridden ahead on stumpy-legged, hairy ponies, leading three more by tether reins. Above six thousand feet the trail that was no trail vanished entirely, and the slopes covered with garigue — a degenerate Mediterranean scrub — and maquis — a thick scrubby underbrush — became too steep; and the shrub ripped loose and clogged the wheel wells. They left the

vehicle and mounted the ponies.

For the most part, they rode in silence. Once, Yaffa fell back and asked Loder, "Now I must know. How do we come to *this* place, of all places? Is it the writing on the seal?"

Loder mopped his brow. "No, we can't decode the engravings. It was more than a hundred years ago, and it was just like what happened to us in Mamoula. A stone turned up, with carvings. They traced it back to Hamah, but the people wouldn't tell them where they were. Eventually, they were located, and that formed the first body of information we had on the Hittite Kingdom.

"The seal was also found. But it was held by one in the employ of the Subhi Pasha, who delivered it to Subhi Bey with everything he had learned of its origin. Which wasn't much. It was a minor find and lay unrecognized until 1980 when an art cache in Baghdad was rifled, and the glyph began its travels through the international art theft underground."

Bobby, who had been listening, broke in. "During my brief and really terrific stay at that country club with bars they called a Federal Pen, I got to know Frondizi, the art forger they put away for those Modiglianis, remember? And he'd gotten it somehow; and he was ready to turn it into a little nest egg for his twilight years, y'know? So I made a deal with him, got the *Enquirer* interested because of the lost tomb angle ..."

Yaffa said, "Tell me of the tomb."

Loder held his pipe and the reins in one hand and, with difficulty and a pipe nail, cleaned the dottle from the bowl. "The glyph is a funerary seal. It came off a sarcophagus. Hittite. We think. Maybe not. Maybe older. No way of knowing because the inscriptions are beyond us. But the Subhi Pasha's man was very precise as to where the tomb was located." He pointed above them. "Up there somewhere, above Mamoula."

"And the glowing of the stone?" Yaffa demanded.

"We didn't know about that," Bobby Shafka said. "It didn't start till the night you found us."

Yaffa was silent for a time, then said, "I think you are two very foolish men." He spurred the pony and pulled ahead of them, saying over his shoulder, "And I am the most foolish of all." He fell in behind the guides.

They were approaching 6500 feet, and mist began to lattice their passage.

There's something I've never told you, that I ought to tell you."

"Why tell me now?"

"Who knows what the hell can happen? I've been riding scared these last few days. When those guys from Mamoula saw this valley..."

"Not valley. This is a meander belt: part of an old flood plain. Very uncommon at this altitude."

"Whatever. When they came out of the pass and saw this, and they wouldn't come down, and they took off ... well, who the hell knows what can happen? And I just wanted to tell you something I never told you."

"Which is —?"

"You gonna be able to handle it?"

"Bobby! For pete's sake, get on with it already!"

"I'm gay. Always have been."

"That's your big secret?"

"Well ... pretty big secret, yeah. My mother never even

knew. That's it, anyway. What, you don't think that's something important enough to tell your best friend?"

"Bobby, I've known you're homosexual since we were fifteen."

"You have?"

"What do you think, I'm smart enough to be the one person you picked for this lunatic trip, but I'm not smart enough to know you're gay? Truly, Bobby, I wouldn't sell you that short."

"Man, I hope I don't have to say I'm sorry we pulled this caper. That stuff in the Subhi Pasha's papers about 'losing your immortal soul' scares the crap outta me!"

"Little late for you to be getting religion, isn't it?"

"Well, you know ... when you spend your life in the closet, and every time some asshole talks about faggots and poofas, you just get to believe you're going to Hell, and you sort of give religion a pass. But what d'ya think, there's something to it? We could be going into someplace we ought not, what d'ya think?"

Loder drew on his pipe, put the little gold reflector over the mouth of the bowl, and sent a cloud of smoke toward the evening sky. "What I think, pal, is that it's not just a little, it's a *lot* too late to be worrying about it."

He pointed to the meander belt below where they had camped on a cusp; to the low central hill encircled by the stream. "That's the core. When we go down there, and we dig, I think we're going to find it's a burial mound. And I think we're going to find something no one has ever seen. And I think we're going to have one deuce of a time lugging it out of here and down these mountains. And I think we should have been better prepared, and maybe had a helicopter standing by, to get us out of here. And I think a whole *lot* of things, Bobby. But about losing 'my immortal soul', well, it's too late for us to try to buy into God's good graces."

Night fell suddenly, and it grew cool enough to come out in the open, and Yaffa found them, and led them down to the meander core, taking with them only the pony carrying water and digging gear. And as they neared the central hill, Bobby Shafka looked at his friend, about to say something from their childhood; and he saw the glyph glowing in Loder's vest pocket and he was frightened at his impertinence, thinking he could pull this off. Just one more harebrained scheme. And this time, lost up here in a valley filling with mist, following a hundred-year-old line of bullshit, he had finally bet too much. This time, he was sure, he was going to take Dennis down with him ... and that was *that* for their immortal souls.

The wind rose. The wind that blows forever between the stars, carrying ancient and encoded messages of indecipherable night. And darkness upon the face of the deep.

The ground split. The glyph became unbearably bright, and the earth split. Yaffa had gone. One moment he was there, beside them, and a moment later ... gone. He had not abandoned them; they never thought that for an instant. He had done what any sensible man would do: he had gotten out while he could. There were those who depended on him, he'd said so. And they were alone with the sarcophagus.

The glyph had shone so brightly, through the heavy duck of Loder's thermal vest, that he had pulled it out, and averted his eyes lest he go blind. Yes, staring into the

sun.

For no reason he could name — no more reason than that which told him he and Bobby Shafka had brought the stone seal home — he laid the glyph on the mound. And the earth split.

They went down the ancient steps carved in the stone, and came to the entrance to the portal. It stood open. When the earth had split, it had made itself an open way.

They needed no flashlights. The glyph illuminated the hewn stone walls of the passage that descended at a shallow angle beneath the meander belt. And far below, ahead of them, lay the sarcophagus. Now they knew, without question.

"If you mention immortal souls one more time," Dennis said tightly, and he ground his teeth, "I will do you in myself."

And they came to the great chamber where the sarcophagus lay.

It was large, but not beautiful. Stone box and lid, deeply etched with inscriptions and a frieze of kings and servants.

Loder bent over the casket and said nothing. He ran his hands over the surface, and looked more closely. Once, he motioned Bobby to him, and pointed to the fractured sigil niche where the glyph had been positioned. "I don't think it was there when they buried this," Dennis said. "They? What? They? Isn't this Hittite?"

Loder shook his head. "It's been reused. It was made for someone else. Look at the lid. That's the name of the king who was buried in this box. It's an early use of the Phoenician alphabet. I'd date this no earlier than 1000 B.C. The glyph is at least three thousand years older ... that's if we believe the tests the *Geographic* paid out a fortune to have run on it." He walked around the sarcophagus, Bobby following in awe.

"These scenes carved on the sides and ends. They're typical of Canaanite and Phoenician art, with a mixture of Egyptian and Asiatic motifs. No, this box came later than what was buried in it."

"So what's in it?" Bobby said, in a hushed tone.

Loder walked to the wall and slid down. He pulled out his pipe and loaded it. "What turned the Sahara from a fertile land into a rocky desert? What caused the collapse of the great empires in the twelfth century B.C.? Desolation, unexplained, for Greece in the seventh century. Why?"

"Stop it, Dennis. You're doing a job on me, so knock it off! What's in the box?"

He lit the pipe and drew deeply. The rich smell of black cavendish, the first alien odor to find its way into the tomb, filled the musty chamber. "It's 1200 B.C. In the heart of the Anatolian plateau the dynasty of the Hittite kings, treated on equal terms with the Pharaohs of Egypt, rulers of all they surveyed, part of the greatest empire the world has ever known, abruptly comes to an end. Their capital city is abandoned. Why?"

"This coffin dates to that period, if I'm worth the faith you had in bringing me along. I know pretty much what I'm talking about; but there are experts; they might..."

"What the fuck is in the goddam box, Dennis?"

"I don't know."

"So what, then? We're both scared out of our minds, this damned rock acts like it wants to jump up and open the casket itself, we've come all this way and if we ever

get back it'll be a miracle. So what's it gonna be? Do we do the thing or do we get the hell out of here? Or what?"

Loder stood and walked to the sarcophagus. Bobby Shafka was a step behind him. He watched as Dennis placed the agonizingly bright sigil at the line where lid and box met. Light flooded from the glyph, spread like lava in that thin line, circumnavigated the casket, and met in brilliance where it had started.

As they stepped back, the lid rose as if lifted from within.

At the same moment they heard the beating of wings.

Down the length of the entrance passage, they heard the beating of wings.

Bobby pulled a pistol from his inside jacket pocket. Dennis had not known he was carrying a weapon.

He faced the mouth of the chamber passage, and he said softly, "I'll kill myself before I'll let them take my soul!"

Then, in a moment, as the chamber filled, there was less time left of life than they could ever have imagined.

Dennis screamed at Bobby. "Soul? Soul? Where do you get that? They don't want your soul ... they're just hungry!"

Then, in an instant, despite the roar of Bobby's gun, there was no time left at all.

And they were table scraps of the great, long banquet to come; at the groaning board laid only for the one-eyed child. (It is said.) □

Reason is a Reptile

By William John Watkins

Reason is a reptile

and it has no friends.

It will come and whisper in your ear

that an old man

is a vegetable that shits

and a slip knot is best

for hanging yourself

Magic is a mammal

that will sit with you

in the rubble of your life

and lick your face

until you laugh.

A Matter of Faith



A recent poll shows that 70 percent of American adults believe in miracles. The last poll taken on our planet, of course, turned up not a single individual who believed in miracles. But then, miracles never occur on our planet. They happen all the time on Earth. Over the past five years, for example, the most beloved black-and-white movies of the Earth creatures have been mutating into full-color versions.

It's an impressive miracle, if not a perfect one. James Stewart might have a bizarre pallor (even for a human being), and his coloring might bleed a little into his surroundings; but the story is intact, and the people of *It's a Wonderful Life* behave stupidly or heroically as required. They are easier to watch, even when their color wavers, than the ones who interrupt them on late-night television to yammer at you about the magic of the clapper or the Chia-Pet. If you are inclined to disdain miracles, you can imagine the movie in black-and-white, which is what I do.

Actually, the Chia-Pet itself is something of a miracle. I've ordered eight of them, and they are growing all over my apartment. I don't know what's supposed to happen now. It was kind of gross painting those seeds on with the brush. But I can just clap, and the lights go off, and I don't see them. What I want to know is, with the chia-pet and the clapper available to anybody who can ante up a few bucks on his MasterCard, how can 30 percent of the adult population *not* believe in miracles?

If the color version of *It's a Wonderful Life* is an impressive miracle, it is nevertheless eclipsed by another, more spectacular and mysterious. I mean the hidden process by which a dignified story, going from book to movie form, acquires a happy ending and a lot of opportunities for the characters to drink Coca-Cola on-screen. It happens every time the film rights of a classic story pass into the public domain. Ultimately the process will have converted the entire corpus of western literature from Jane Austen to Emile Zola. The Bennet sisters offer myriad occasions for drinking Coke with each other, and, although *Pride and Prejudice* already has a happy ending, it could be a little more upbeat. I am waiting for the full-color, Coca-Cola version of *I, Claudius* in which everybody guzzles soft drinks out of brightly colored cans and it turns out all the poisonings were just a goof.

Miracles abound on Earth. The human being goes about his business as best he can. He wakes up one day, and there is microwave popcorn, or overnight delivery, instant rebates, Craftmatic adjustable beds, on-line shopping, color photocopies, bar code check-out, photos from Saturn, smart houses. No wonder human beings are fundamentally spiritual animals.

Shamanism and voodoo are no longer practiced openly in the United States outside the publishing industry, but the country still supports over half a million clergy. And it is widely believed among commentators that spirituality is on the rise in this country. The signs of a deep

and abiding concern with the mysteries of the universe are indeed there. Throughout the land, people are getting their colors done, subscribing to basic cable, and attending self-esteem seminars.

America has often been swept with waves of spiritualism and religious revival. Economic hardship and technological achievement seem to combine periodically to overwhelm the human psyche. At these times, they have recourse to their sacred writings:

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[ d : ] [ p a t h ] B A C K U P
d:[path][filename[.ext]]d:[S]/
M/[A]/D:mm-dd-yy
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Human religion is founded on mystery and unquestioning faith. You have to be unquestioning to believe your time is well used learning about filename extensions, paths, and back-slashes. The faithful believe their efforts will be rewarded and that following the sacred texts to the letter will lead ultimately to salvation:

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[ d : ] [ p a t h ] R E S T O R E
d:[d:][path]filename[.ext][S]/[P]
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Religious faith is an important aspect of human life, but at least these creatures are sensible enough to pursue it with moderation. In the United States, there are more people under correctional supervision than there are Episcopalians. □

Targets

By Lawrence Watt-Evans

Art by Bob Eggleton

Sunlight gleamed from the barrel of the main gun, still thrusting upward at empty sky. He did not think it had moved since his last visit. Except when he had insisted, he did not believe it had moved in years, perhaps decades. Every so often he would order the turret to be turned, the barrel to be raised and lowered, just to be sure that the harsh desert climate had not yet damaged the machinery beyond repair.

Of course, the caterpillar treads and most of the left rear quadrant had already been damaged beyond repair when he had first found the stranded machine, but that had not been the desert's doing.

He walked up slowly, his hands raised. The machine remained motionless.

"Hello, Killer," he called. "It's me."

"Good morning, sir," the machine answered in its inhuman monotone — the military had never bothered with such frills as humanizing the voices of their machines. A small sensor turret swiveled to follow the old man as he approached. "Identity confirmed," the machine said.

He lowered his hands, stepped forward, and pulled himself up to a comfortable perch on the sloping plastic armor of the foredeck. "Fine day, isn't it?" he asked conversationally as he unslung his shoulder pack and dropped it beside him.

"Yes, sir. I am required to ask whether you have noticed any evidence of enemy activity." The sensor turret scanned the horizon swiftly before returning to his face.

"Nope, not a thing. Sorry, Killer." He patted the hot plastic.

"Yes, sir."

"I don't believe that you'll be seeing any more action, you know."

"You have expressed this opinion before, sir. I cannot rely on your opinion."

"I know, I know," he said, "but look out there. You've got radios, scanners, everything; do you see *anything* out there but empty desert?" He waved his hand at the broad expanse of sand and scrap metal where once a thousand armored battle machines had clashed. Of the thousand, a few had survived, to move on to other places and other battles. Most were weathered wreckage on the sands. Of them all, only this one, Self-Directed Tank, Model 304K "Westmoreland IV," Serial Number 443, was still here and still functioning. If any salvage crew had worked the area it had missed it, or perhaps decided that it was not worth saving with its left tread and main engine spread over a dozen hectares of desert, its tail buried in a shellhole and its nose cocked skyward.

He had found it quite by accident, years before, when he first fled from Resurrection City. He had spoken to it in his rusty Pre-War English — not many people were left who could speak the language — and had identified himself, given name, rank, and serial number, without mentioning that he had been cashiered even before the war

wound down to its inevitable meaningless draw.

It was only a machine, and a stupid military one at that, but it was better company than the empty desert, the scurrying lizards, or the snakes that slept in the sun.

"Do you see anything out there?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir. A party of infantry appears to be approaching."

"What?" He whirled. "Where?" he demanded.

"Fifteen degrees east of south."

The old man squinted into the sun, peering past his own ramshackle shelter and supply dump. He had a pair of good binoculars in his pack, rebuilt from the rangefinding apparatus on one of the wrecked tanks, but he did not want to bother digging them out, not yet.

When his eyes had adjusted, he could make out a few figures moving on the horizon.

"Damn," he said. "I wonder who they are?"

He had a suspicion, however. He guessed that the people of Resurrection City had, after all these long years, decided they needed him again.

"Track them," he said, "but don't fire until I tell you. They may not be hostile." He paused, then added as an afterthought, "And even if they are, we may not want to fire on them. There may be better targets later."

"Understood, sir," the tank replied. The old man heard machinery grinding, and watched as the long gun barrel lowered itself slowly. A motor whined, and the main turret traversed slightly, training the gun on the distant figures.

The old man looked up at the gun and asked, "Ah ... how much ammunition do you have left?"

"Eight shells for the main armament, sir. Forty-six rounds for the machine guns; at present all are in the Number Two magazine, but they can be moved if necessary. Two pulse guns and the Number Three particle beam still functional, not at optimum."

"Any missiles?"

"No, sir. Racks and magazines empty."

That was no surprise. He chided himself for bothering to ask. "All right, Killer," he said, "track them."

"Yes, sir."

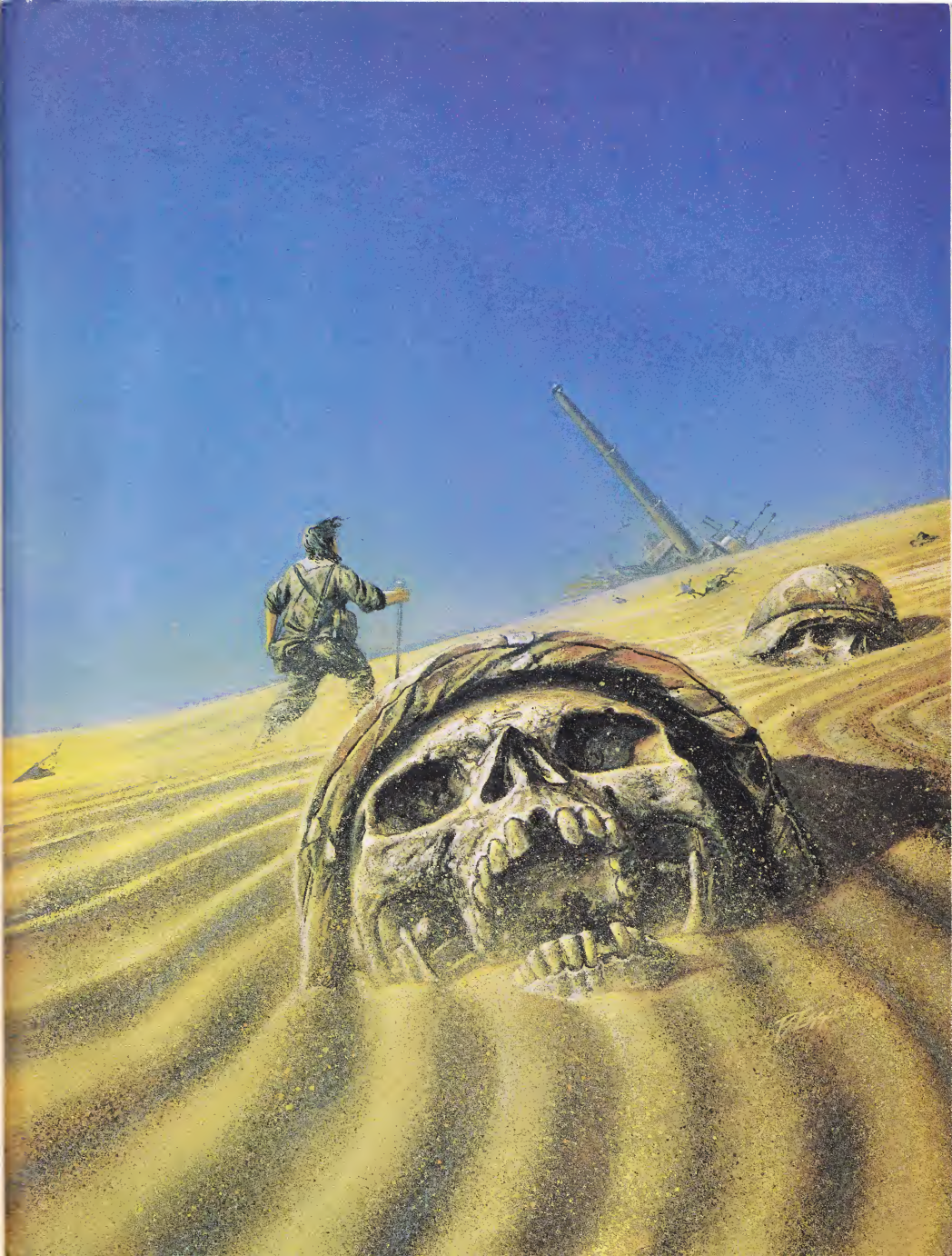
The scanner turret rose slightly and whirled softly to itself, but remained pointed toward the approaching party.

"Can you make out any details?" he asked.

"No, sir," the tank replied. It made no excuses, gave no explanations. He liked that. The machine never tried to justify itself, never invented reasons; it did what it was programmed to do.

He smiled, and muttered under his breath, "I yam what I yam, and that's all that I yam. I should have called you 'Popeye,' Killer."

"Yes, sir," the machine replied, startling him. He had



INFRASCAN

77

23

FULL MAG

BE91

70RH

96RH

102RH 126RH

not meant it to hear him.

He sat, watching, for what seemed a very long time. Sometimes he used the binoculars; mostly he didn't bother, since he really didn't care much about details. Sweat ran down his sunken brown chest, down his bent back, from his stringy thighs, until the plastic beneath him was damp with it. The sun inched its way slowly across the heavens. The band of humans drew steadily closer.

The tank said nothing; it simply went about its business, tracking its chosen target. The sensor turret whirled occasionally but did not move; the main gun lowered imperceptibly every so often. As with the hour hand on an analog clock, the old man never saw it move, but all the same, every so often he noticed it was lower.

The distant figures grew.

At roughly the point that they became discernible to the naked eye as definitely human, with hands and faces and clothing, carrying weapons and packs, the machine broke the long silence to say, "Unidentified infantry are within extreme sidearm range, sir. It might be advisable to take shelter."

"No," he said, "I'll wait. Let's see what they want."

"Yes, sir."

He knew the machine was just obeying orders, but he found himself almost touched by its solicitousness.

"Infantry are not in any known uniform, sir."

"They may be civilians, Killer."

"Unlikely, sir," the machine said.

He glanced at the sensor turret, startled. That was not an assessment he would have expected the tank to make. It appeared that the machine was still able to surprise him, despite uncounted visits over the years, innumerable chats on the nonexistent military situation, and a thousand assorted strategy games they had played out together.

"We'll see," he said.

It was not much longer before the party came within hailing distance. There were five of them, all men, all armed. He waited for them to make the first move.

"Hello!" one of them shouted at last.

He waved, but did not shout back.

"Sergeant Cerullo, is that you?" the spokesman called, speaking the local patois.

He waved again, the dampness on which he sat suddenly uncomfortable. He shifted, and in an instant the dry desert air had sopped up the puddle of sweat.

They were looking for him, as he had feared. "What do you want?" he yelled back in the same tongue.

"We want to talk to you!"

"Did you come to take me back?"

The spokesman hesitated, then called, "Yes, actually, we did."

"What if I don't want to go?" he called.

"Well, we're here to convince you," the spokesman answered.

"What if I won't be convinced?"

The men were close enough that he could see the leader's smile, as well as the younger man behind him shifting his rifle, readying it for use. "Well, we'll just see, I guess."

"Fire a warning shot," the old man said quietly, in English.

The sound of a single shot from the forward right

machine gun snapped out. He did not see where the bullet went.

The five men stopped.

"I'm not going anywhere," he said. "You tell Whittaker that."

Above him, the main gun whirled as the barrel lowered slightly, taking aim at the newcomers' feet.

The five men conferred warily amongst themselves; he could not hear what was said.

An idea suddenly came to him.

"Can you hear them, Killer?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"What are they saying?"

The monotone voice did not answer; instead, he heard a strange voice saying, in the postwar tongue, "Hey, Cap, that old loony has a fuckin' tank! I'm not going any closer!" The tank paused, then added, in its own voice and language, "They are not speaking English, sir."

"I know," he replied. "It's a local dialect."

The discussion continued for a moment, then four of the men turned away. The fifth, the spokesman, paused long enough to shout, "We'll be back, Sergeant!"

Then the entire party marched away, at the same pace as they had come.

He watched them go for several minutes.

"Sir," the tank asked, distracting him, "did you understand what was said?"

"Sure, Killer; I speak their language. You heard me answer them."

"Could you explain the situation to me? Were they enemy troops?"

He hesitated. "Not exactly, Killer. They're from a place called Resurrection City — a neutral power, I guess you'd consider it. It was built after the war — I mean, after the fighting let up some." He knew, from past experience, that the tank refused to accept that the war was over. Only a commissioned officer could tell it that, and he had never made it past technical sergeant. "I lived there for awhile — after my unit got shot up — and at first I thought it was a good idea." He sighed at the memory. "They had a nice set-up; they'd salvaged a lot of what they needed, and were building or growing the rest, and everything was nicely organized. They had their own money, their own laws. But it didn't last. This young hotshot decided to make it even better, and set up a lot of rules and regulations to keep everything fair. He convinced most of the younger people to join him, said that the older people were to blame for the war." He shook his head. "People can be stupid, Killer. They started holding war-crime trials; they hanged everyone who had fought for either side. Except me."

He stopped for a moment, remembering.

He had watched his friends — his enemies, too, for that matter — face their trials. Some had spoken out eloquently, some had remained silent; some had stood proudly, others had begged and pleaded. None of it had mattered. All had been hanged.

His own defense had been unique. He had displayed his dishonorable discharge, claiming that he had refused to fight.

In a way, that was the truth; in his first battle he had turned and run, and he refused to follow orders to rejoin his company. He had told himself at the time that he was simply being sensible, obeying nature's first law and

guarding his own life by refusing to make himself a target for the enemy. The army had called it cowardice, and now, from the perspective of forty years' distance, he had reached the conclusion that they had both been right. Common sense and cowardice definitely overlapped.

Of course, he couldn't tell Killer any of that.

He remembered the lines of gallows that Whittaker and his gang had built, and how they had sagged beneath the weight of his own old comrades, most of whom had long forgiven his cowardice. Whittaker had not been inclined to forgive anything.

He never forgot anything, either. He had looked at Cerullo's records and had allowed his defense.

The old man knew that it had not been because Whittaker had accepted the argument, nor was it a simple act of mercy. It was a matter of politics, just as the trials and executions had been. Whittaker was using the veterans as a scapegoat; killing them cleared away a lot of lingering malaise and confusion that had hung over the settlement. Any problems could be blamed on the veterans.

It also relieved the overcrowding and the strain on the colony's severely limited resources, of course.

And poor old Sergeant Cerullo had been spared in order to demonstrate the reasonableness of Whittaker's government, to show that their justice could be tempered with mercy, that they were not bloodthirsty tyrants.

And, more importantly, Sergeant Cerullo could be useful. Resurrection City needed pre-war and wartime technology to survive, more so under Whittaker than before. All the technicians, however, had been veterans. No one in the younger generations had ever picked up more than the rudiments of mechanics; they had been too busy surviving to learn, and their elders had been too busy surviving to teach them.

So good old Sergeant Cerullo, the coward, would be very handy to keep the machines running.

And he had been, for a time.

"There was a man called Whittaker, Abner Whittaker, who took charge. Took command. I didn't like him." That was an understatement; the old man had recognized Whittaker for what he was. "So I left." He had sabotaged his own machines and left one night, and had been pleasantly surprised when no one came after him. "After all, I wasn't a citizen there, or anything."

Being a citizen didn't help much. The last time he had ventured back near Resurrection City the ring of barbed wire around the settlement had been doubled and built up to a good four meters high. The City had no external enemies; it never had. That fence was to keep the citizens in. Whittaker's reign of terror had not stopped with the veterans.

"I guess, though, that they want me back. They came out here looking for me."

"Yes, sir," the machine acknowledged.

"I don't want to go back."

"No, sir."

"If they come back, even if I'm not here, you open fire. I warned them this time; if they come back it's their own fault." He hesitated. "Ah ... you can identify them, can't you?"

"Yes, sir."

Again, it offered no further explanation, leaving him to guess. Had it studied their faces, the infrared patterns of their bodies, the rhythm of their hearts?

He didn't know, and decided against asking.

The five men vanished over the southeastern horizon, and a few hours later the sun prepared to vanish over the western horizon. The old man slid down off the armored foredeck and prepared to head home.

"You take care of yourself, Killer," he said.

"Yes, sir," the tank replied.

He spent the next morning hauling water up from the river, taking breaks every so often to try to net the fish that gleamed beneath the surface. Shortly before noon he got lucky and actually landed one — a small one, and he was unsure what sort of fish it was, but it made a fine lunch.

When he had eaten he headed back for the old battlefield.

As he topped the last gentle rise out of the river's shallow valley he glimpsed movement; he stopped and stared, then dug out his binoculars.

The five men from Resurrection City had returned. They were marching directly toward Killer. He focused the binoculars in as best he could at the bundle they were carrying, hoping he had been mistaken in his first assessment.

He had not been mistaken. They were carrying a portable rocket launcher and a bundle of armor-piercing rockets.

They were going to kill Killer.

Unless, of course, Killer got them first. He remembered the order he had given, to shoot if they came back. Killer would obey that.

Killer only had eight rounds for the big gun, though, and forty-six — no, forty-five — for the machine guns. The lasers were all broken, the pulse guns and particle beams short-range and intended mostly for use against electronic equipment, not people.

And Killer was immobilized. The main turret could no longer turn all the way, thanks to the damage to the rear deck, and the machine guns had never been meant to swivel beyond a small arc. It would fight, but if the men had any brains at all they would be able to find a safe spot and fire away until Killer was just another pile of scrap.

One or two of the men might be killed in the process; the old man certainly hoped that Killer would be able to nail at least one of them. The final outcome, though, seemed certain.

As yet no one had noticed his own presence, though. This was his chance to flee, to go someplace Whittaker's men would never find him. Killer would keep these five busy for quite a while.

He turned, then paused and turned back.

He couldn't do it. He couldn't leave Killer to be shot up that way.

That's stupid, he told himself. It's just a machine, just an idiot military robot. It's not alive. And you fled readily enough before, when it was your country and your comrades at stake.

He wavered, but was not convinced. The tank was not alive, true, but he still did not want to see it destroyed. Killer itself, if it possessed any analog of emotions at all, might welcome a final battle and an end to its long vigil, but he, Sergeant John Cerullo, did not want to see it destroyed.

It was all he had left.

A crippled war machine, weathering away in the

desert, was all he had left to show for his life. The war that had taken everything else from him and from the world had left him this one thing, and he did not want to lose it.

If he turned and fled, he would have nothing left at all, nothing but his life. He had fled before, and all he had come away with was his life.

If he stayed, he could bargain with Whittaker, refuse to work unless Killer was left intact. Perhaps he could find other things to bargain about as well. Whittaker would not kill him; he was too valuable.

He would be giving up his freedom, of course. He would be giving up the desert, giving up his long talks with Killer, his strategy games.

He would know, though, that the tank was still out there. Someday he might come back — or somebody else might.

The fact that Whittaker needed him, after so long, suggested that perhaps things were not going well in Resurrection City. Perhaps, before very much longer, the entire settlement might be free again, and he with them.

Even if that never happened, he could probably wrangle his own liberty somehow. And Killer would be waiting.

Perhaps that would be worth a short stint in hell.

He'd spent his life looking out for himself, being a common-sense coward, and he was tired of it. He'd stayed alive when the others had died, and what had it gotten him?

A shack in the desert and a dumb machine as his only friend — a friend he would betray if he fled. The time had come, finally, to live dangerously.

"Hey!" he called, at the top of his lungs. "Over here!"

□

The Matter of Beaupré

By Frederik Pohl

Art by Robert Pasternak

We don't know how many other decisions were handed down before the Supreme Court got around to *Beaupré v. National Academy of Sciences, et al.* that morning. Luckily, we do know what some of them might have been because of Sally Simpson. She is not only our one source for the exact text of the majority opinion in *Beaupré*, she also had copies of six other verdicts in her briefcase. So from these we know that the Court ordered a new trial for two defense contractors convicted of fraud, upheld a New York City plan for establishing one-man-one-vote districts throughout the metropolitan area, and declined to intervene in three other cases brought before it, thus leaving the lower court decisions unchanged.

We know what the habits of the Court were, too. No doubt that day started like any other decision Monday. At 10 a.m. that Monday morning the nine justices would have filed into the Court chamber and taken their regular seats. The Chief Justice's seat was in the center of the red-draped room, with four of her associate judges on either side. Since no arguments would be heard at least until the afternoon, the hall would not have been full. There would have been a few lawyers involved in each of the cases being disposed of, along with a dozen or so reporters and a few ordinary citizens, there to watch the deliberations of the U.S.A.'s highest judicial body. Probably *Beaupré* was the fourth or fifth decision to be handed down that day. Since the majority opinion was written by Associate Justice Henson, it is probable that he was allowed to deliver it.

That event took place, as we know, at 10:33 a.m., Eastern Daylight Savings Time.

The United States Supreme Court had a very full docket that term, partly because the caseload kept growing every year, but even more because the political

balance of the Court had tilted significantly.

That was inevitable, considering the way the American presidential elections had been going. What was surprising was that it had taken so long. The reason for that was obstinacy; several of the oldest justices had hung on long past the time when their ambition required, or their physical condition really encouraged, continued service, hoping for a president who would replace them with someone like themselves. They hung in there all through the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush, but when Quayle began his first term they could last no longer. One justice died — the doctors called it pneumonia, but actually it was just frustration. Three others, abandoning hope, resigned. The Senate put up a fierce struggle against the first few nominations to replace them, but in the long run it had to let the administration choose *somebody*. It managed to defeat the nomination of Fred Schwarz in committee — mostly because he wasn't American-born — but by the time Pat Robertson's name came up, the senators had run out of steam.

Thus the O'Connor Court. And every group in America that was against abortion or the *Miranda* rules, or in favor of guns or capital punishment, began polishing up its best new cases to litigate, since they saw a heaven-sent opportunity to get their judicial losses of the past reversed, *now*.

Beaupré was only one of the historic cases the Supreme Court heard in that term, but it was the most important. On the face of it it was simple enough. Simon Beaupré, father of a ten-year-old grammar-school student in Ville Platte, Louisiana, had brought suit against the National Academy of Sciences, the local school board, the Louisiana Department of Education, and some twenty-three individuals at all levels of science and government. He

objected to their forcing his daughter to study the evil and blasphemous doctrine of evolution, and he wanted an injunction to make them stop.

The first federal judge to hear his complaint threw it out. Beaupré did not give up. Three television evangelists had been following his efforts and pitched in to help him raise the funds to appeal. The appellate court ordered a new trial before a different federal judge, and this time Beaupré had more and better lawyers. They added some far-reaching new grounds to the suit. Beaupré's original plea had been purely on the basis of freedom of religion, but the law professors from the Hoover Institute believed that broader issues were involved. Darwinian evolution, they pointed out, was a foreign invention. The "laws" of evolution were *English* laws, and what, they argued, had the American Revolution been fought for if not for the principle that foreigners could not legislate for free Americans?

As the case moved up from appeal to appeal, new blood attached itself to both sides. The American Civil Liberties Union, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the American Association of University Professors weighed in with *amicus* briefs for the defense; the Moral Majority, the Mormon Church, and the American Legion came in for the plaintiff.

The Court took an almost unprecedented five weeks to hear arguments on *Beaupré*, in spite of its full calendar, and the public debate raged throughout the United States. When the hearing was concluded the justices began writing their opinions. That was all done in private, of course, and the traditional secrecy of the Court was maintained — though we do know a little now, because of the good luck of Sally Simpson's hasty trip to the bedside of her injured father. But in public the battle raged on.

Those of us Canadians who lived near enough to the border to get American television stations saw the struggle going on every day. On *Meet the Press* Carl Sagan said, "Evolution has taken billions and billions of years to make us what we are. Don't be ashamed of our ancestry. Be proud that we're getting better." Simon Beaupré himself appeared in a ninety-second interview on the NBC Nightly News. He said evolution was a liberal-commie-atheist lie that was spread to shake people's faith in God, and he fiddled with his tie the whole time he was on the air. Even Tom Brokaw couldn't make himself take the man seriously, but a lot of others did.

The Creation Science people had a lot of friends. A lot of them came aboard. The Brookings Institute joined the suit, asking to include the laws of Marxian dialectics in the body under review. The President didn't want to get involved at first, but when his Director of the Budget told him that the suit could get rid of Gresham's Law and most of Adam Smith, the President said, "Well, hey, buddy, go for it. No new taxes ever." Even the Pentagon got the fever. One of their people at Lawrence Livermore pointed out that it would really help the Strategic Defense Initiative if they could get rid of the Law of Inverse Squares ... and that was when it all hit the fan.

The pollsters took a survey just the week before the decision came down. The question was, "Do you oppose legislation without representation?" 51 percent did, 13 percent didn't, and the rest of the sample had no opinion.

Of course, they probably hadn't thought the matter

through. But then, neither had the Court — as is now obvious.

It was a few days after that poll — on the Sunday before the decision was handed down, to be exact — when Sally Simpson entered the story.

At the age of twenty-five, this young woman had been at the top of her class all through law school, climaxing it with the editorship of *The Harvard Law Review* in her senior year. The Chief Justice had been happy to accept her as a clerk, and Simpson appears to have done very well in the Court.

On that Sunday morning, however, Simpson was awakened by a phone call to tell her that her father had been injured in a hunting accident in the northern Ontario woods. Simpson and her father were very close, and she did not hesitate. She stopped off at the typing pool in the basement of the Supreme Court Building to pick up a batch of decisions, crammed them in a briefcase, and jumped in a cab for Washington National Airport. Strictly speaking, she shouldn't have taken the papers. They were not supposed to leave the Court building for any reason until handed down in the Monday morning session; but Simpson felt an obligation to read them over on the plane, in case any corrections needed to be phoned in.

So when Simpson arrived at the hospital where her father had been taken she was well aware that in the Monday morning session the Court would issue its declaratory judgment, stating that only laws passed by the Congress of the United States or its lesser legislatures could be held binding within its borders. She did not think a great deal about its consequences. The paper had no obvious typos, and she was worried about her father.

When Simpson reached her father's bedside she was happy to find him limping, but otherwise well enough. But there was no way for her to get back to Washington in time for the Monday session, which saved her life.

I was having a cup of coffee in my office in Toronto that Monday morning. My window faced the lake, and I was standing at it, gazing out, when it happened. I saw the whole thing.

Fortunately, it was a warm morning and the window was open; otherwise I would surely have been cut up by the flying fragments of glass. The whole sky over Lake Ontario lit up. There wasn't any noise, at least not right away. There was just that super-flashbulb flare in the sky — the *whole* sky, from one end of the lake to the other, as far as I could see.

The noise came later.

By then all the U.S.-half of Lake Ontario had turned to steam. The good part of that was that it shut out some of that terrible light. The bad part was the storm winds. That was when the CN Tower went down, and every window in Toronto that faced the lake blew out — or rather, in. At least a hundred people died of cuts from the broken glass.

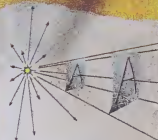
I thought it was the end of the world.

Of course, now we all know that it couldn't have been that. Most of the world wasn't affected at all, directly. It was only the United States of America that was concerned in the event — all of the "Lower Forty-Eight" states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the American Virgins. Unfortunately for Californians, it was a late spring day; the sun had already risen over Los Angeles.



Scale 1:50 000 000

ORTH AMERICA-PH



The uniform spreading out of emanations from a point source. Note that at the radius of the spherical segment is doubled, the corresponding area is four times larger.



THE chemicals becoming more and more fertilizers are used to in turn is sprayed with chemicals are also the food. We breath in the and it also falls down



Scale 1:50 000 000



ROBERT PASTERNAK
Sopertland Ave. Winnipeg, MB
NEW OGS all contents 2.00



When anything diffuses uniformly source, it spreads out thinner and thinner surfaces as it advances. These surfaces of concentric spheres, each of area $4\pi r^2$ face as will later emerge densely th activity as if you held something tenuously of a point spray, the flow becomes weak, paint arriving on each square of surface distance squared (1/r²). Kepler knew this of light: the inverse-square emission put Far away the light, spread out over a large, maskably close to embracing this same line but other erroneous assumptions kept him fix who died too soon at only 23, was an arde. He established the wide applicability of showed the lunar orbit to be elliptical; of Kepler's laws. Horrocks's notes hint at a peric as a mutual attraction between the planets, Soon after Galileo's death, the French ma Roberval took to the field (against Descartes) b with a mutual attraction between all matter. In 1645, Ismael Bullialdus, a French astr course of rightly cr... attraction

Two years

ROBERT PASTERNAK 90



A narrow slice of the easternmost edge of Alaska was affected, too, but the rest of the Alaskans and all the Hawaiians got off scot-free, and so did Guam. (They still call themselves "the United States," I hear, but no one pays much attention.) But in all the rest of the world where the U.S. writ ran, the Law of Inverse Squares ceased to apply.

It took a bit over seven minutes, at the speed of light, for the superhot, killing radiation from the surface of the sun to reach New York and Chicago, San Juan and Seattle, San Diego and New Orleans, and all the points in between. Because it was not weakened by the inverse-squares law, it arrived as hot as it had left — *flaming* hot; star-hot. Too hot for any material thing it struck to survive.

Then it was over.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision was no longer binding, since the U.S. didn't exist any longer ... and slowly things started back to normal.

There isn't much left of the old United States any more — physically, I mean. Nobody visits that blank space on the map. Naturally not; it's still too hot to live on.

They do say that in a year or two maybe some of the mountaintops, at least, could be tolerable, provided you wore thick shoes. No one is going to try it out right away, though. We do have the pictures from the reconnaissance satellites, and they show as much detail as anyone could wish. There's not much to show, apart from the wreck of some of the cities. New York certainly looks odd, with all those skyscrapers melted down to stumps. Miami, on the other hand, looks surprisingly intact; they were having a really severe thunderstorm that Monday morning, and the clouds took a second or two to burn away — long enough to save many of the buildings, though not, of course, the people.

I just hope it doesn't get worse. I wish I were sure it wouldn't.

See, when they disallowed the Law of Inverse Squares, that meant the heat from the sun came down and burned the United States away. It wasn't weakened at all by distance; since the Law of Inverse Squares didn't apply anymore, it was just as though the surface of the sun and the surface of the Earth were actually touching. Everybody understands that now — and how it took seven minutes to happen, because that's how long it takes heat and light to cross the 93 million miles that separate sun and Earth.

Unfortunately, the sun isn't the only star around.

Alpha Centauri is even hotter than the sun. It's four light-years away; which is to say, it takes light four years to get from there to here. That gives us a little time to think and plan, or at least to worry.

And Alpha Centauri is only one star. They say there are a couple of hundred billion stars in our galaxy alone. Not to mention all those other galaxies, farther away.

So I'm keeping my fingers crossed. I never really hated Americans. They couldn't help being big and powerful, and I suppose when you're that way it's very tempting to throw your weight around — and Americans were never any good at resisting temptation ... but I hate the idea that this kind of thing could become a *habit*. □

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